

# JUDAISM

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## THE GENESIS OF JUDAISM

Robert Gordis

## NIGHT TRAIN FROM MILAN

David W. Weiss

## RETURNING TO GERMANY: FORTY-THREE YEARS LATER

Bernhard Frank

## ARABS IN ISRAELI FICTION

Menahem D. Rotshtein

## SELF-IDENTIFICATION IN JEWISH SOCIETY

Jakob J. Petuchowski

Norman B. Mirsky

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JUDAISM, conceived as a free and non-partisan organ, is dedicated to the creative discussion and exposition of the religious, moral and philosophical concepts of Judaism and their relevance to the problems of modern society. Through an exploration of the meaning and needs of the Jewish experience, it hopes to widen the channels of communication among Jews and to affirm Jewish verity and vitality to the world at large.

Views and opinions expressed in the articles and reviews are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Editors or the American Jewish Congress.

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# JUDAISM

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL

Issue No. 120 / Volume 30 / Number 4 / Fall 1981

|  |                        |     |
|--|------------------------|-----|
| <i>The First Reader</i>  | R. G.                  | 387 |
| <i>The Genesis of JUDAISM: A Chapter in Jewish Cultural History</i>                    | ROBERT GORDIS          | 390 |
| <i>Night Train From Milan</i>  | DAVID W. WEISS         | 396 |
| <i>Returning to Germany: Forty-three Years Later (Poem)</i>                            | BERNHARD FRANK         | 407 |
| <i>The Trials of Sarah</i>   | ADRIEN JANIS BLEDSTEIN | 411 |
| <i>The Dilemma of Women's Equality in the History of Reform Judaism</i>                | RIV-ELLEN PRELL        | 418 |
| <i>The Tragedy of Bourgeois Cosmopolitanism: On Martin Buber's Politics</i>            | NORMAN LEVINE          | 427 |
| <i>What Is A Jew?</i>  | JAKOB J. PETUCHOWSKI   | 434 |
| <i>Cemetery in Missouri (Poem)</i>   | ALLEN KANFER           | 443 |
| <i>Toward a Theory of Modern Jewish Social Control</i>                                 | NORMAN B. MIRSKY       | 444 |
| <i>C.G. Montefiore and his Quest</i>   | MAURICE G. BOWLER      | 453 |
| <i>Orthodoxy Resurgent</i>   | DAVID J. SCHNALL       | 460 |
| <i>History and Modern Jewish Thought: Spinoza and Mendelssohn on the Ritual Law</i>    | MICHAEL L. MORGAN      | 467 |
| <i>Mr. Sammler's Planet Ten Years Later: Looking Back on the Crisis of "Mishpocha"</i> | SOL GITTLEMAN          | 480 |
| <i>A Study in Ambivalence: Arabs in Israeli Fiction</i>                                | MENAHEN D. ROTSHEIN    | 484 |

## REVIEWS

|  |                |     |
|--|----------------|-----|
| <i>The Messiah Texts</i><br>by Raphael Patai<br>and<br><i>Revelation and Redemption: Jewish Documents of Deliverance from the Fall of Jerusalem to the Death of Nahmanides</i><br>by George Wesley Buchanan  | IRA ROBINSON   | 496 |
| <i>Gates of Forgiveness (Sha'arey Selihah)</i><br>ed. by Chaim Stern   | ERIC FRIEDLAND | 499 |
| <i>Prophets Without Honor: A Background to Freud Kafka, Einstein and Their World</i><br>by Fredric V. Grunfeld<br>and<br><i>The Tongue Set Free: Remembrance of a European Childhood</i><br>by Elias Canetti | DAVID BIALE    | 504 |
| INDEX to Volume 30   |                | 509 |

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## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In increasing measure, modern men are turning again to the quest for a worldview on the issues that are timeless—the meaning of life, the challenge of death, the purpose of suffering, the significance of the individual, his relation to society, and the goal of history. In order to advance this enterprise of spiritual discovery of our time this Journal has been projected. It will be primarily concerned with the philosophy, ethics, and religion of Judaism as a factor in the contemporary world . . .

We are committed to the proposition that Judaism has positive value today for Jews and for the world . . . At the same time, we disassociate ourselves from the dangerous tendency toward the hardening of party lines on the contemporary Jewish scene . . . The members of the Board of Editors belong to every school of Jewish life or to none. The trends popularly referred to as Orthodox, Conservatism, Reform, Reconstructionism, as well as others that as yet have no specific names, have their advocates among us, though no institution or movement is officially represented . . . Undoubtedly, our differences will find expression in these pages, but we shall be at one in opposing the dogmatism which takes for granted that one's own particular standpoint has a monopoly on truth and the authoritarianism which would suppress any contrary point of view.

*Judaism* will be dedicated to the quest for truth in the spirit of freedom. Our columns will be open to anyone who has something significant to say and the ability to say it well. New and unconventional interpretations, whatever their standpoint, will be welcomed from every source, for we share the conviction of the Talmud that "Both these and the others are the words of the living God." *From the introductory article by Robert Gordis, "Toward a Renaissance of Judaism" in Vol. I, No. 1.*



## *The First Reader*

### *We Mark a Major Birthday*

Observant readers of JUDAISM will have noticed that the issues this year carry the designation "Volume 30." Thirty years represent a major portion of the adult life of a human being. In our age of flux, it is a significant period in the life of an institution as well.

If JUDAISM is not the longest-lived Jewish journal appearing in America, it surely has few rivals in longevity. From the time I first proposed its publication to the leadership of the American Jewish Congress three decades ago, one hundred twenty issues, constituting a veritable library of Jewish thought, have appeared without interruption.

On November 22, 1981, an all-day conference is being convened by the American Jewish Congress to mark this auspicious anniversary. The basic themes of the conference will be "An American Jewish Culture — Does It Exist, Is It Possible?" and "The American Impact on Judaism." A distinguished panel of speakers and discussants will analyze these issues in depth.

This seems to be the proper time to record the background and origins of the journal. I believe that our readers will be interested in "The Genesis of JUDAISM", which is the opening paper in the current issue.

### *The Scars of Nazism*

The horror of Nazism continues to cast a gigantic black shadow athwart the life of contemporary Jews, particularly those who themselves encountered the beast and carry the scars on their own person.

In this issue we publish two such testaments to the enduring agony of the Nazi Holocaust. In his reminiscence, "Night Train From Milan," *David W. Weiss* recalls not only the horror of the greatest *hurban*, or destruction, in Jewish history, he draws strength from the sources of holiness and heroism in the Jewish tradition and his family background which made it possible to overcome the enemy and survive.

Totally different in approach is a sequence of nine sonnets by *Bernhard Frank*. Forty-three years after he had fled Germany as a child with his family, the poet revisited his native land. Obviously, each Jew who visits Germany will react differently. His response will be the result of his memories during the Hitler era, as colored by subsequent experiences, as refracted by the timbre of his own personality.

In this poetic statement, entitled "Returning to Germany: Forty-three Years Later," Bernhard Frank gives vigorous and poignant expression to his own feelings, as he finds the horrors of the Holocaust and its enduring aftermath still reverberating within him.

*The Ongoing Struggle for Women's Equality*

The heightening of women's consciousness in our day has led to a re-examination of the role of women in the Jewish tradition from the Bible to our own day. The life and character of the Biblical matriarch is the subject of *Adrien Janis Bledstein's* paper, "The Trials of Sarah."

As is almost always the case, the practice of women's rights is far more complicated than the theory. In her paper "The Dilemma of Women's Equality in the History of Reform Judaism," *Riv-Ellen Prell* discusses the official equalization of women's rights in that movement. She maintains that the progress registered in this area was largely illusory, because of the basically non-ritualistic character of Reform.

*Buber's Politics*

The magisterial character of Buber's thought is beyond question. However, in his paper, "The Tragedy of Bourgeois Cosmopolitanism: On Martin Buber's Politics," Norman Levine argues that Buber's concern with the transcendental deprived him of a clear perception of the nitty-gritty problems of Jewish national existence. Thus, his ideal of a bi-national state in Palestine was, and remains, an impossible goal.

*More on Jewish Identification*

The English Bible translates the Biblical phrase applied to Israel, *am segulah*, as "a peculiar people." Even in the modern meaning of the adjective, the phrase is appropriate to Jews. Hence the discussion, "What is a Jew," continues to be a live and controversial issue and clarifying it a significant contribution to Jewish self-understanding.

*Jakob J. Petuchowski* offers his interpretation of the nature of the covenant which creates Israel. As against his ideal construction of the nature of Jewish belonging, *Norman B. Mirsky* discusses the problems confronting various groups in the Jewish community whose commitment is less than total and whose conduct is less than ideal. His discussion inevitably sheds light on the theoretic issue of Jewish identity.

*Montefiore, the Theologian*

Perhaps the leading theologian produced by British Jewry is Claude G. Montefiore, a scion of the well-known philanthropic family, who became an exponent of left-wing Reform, which was strongly universalist in emphasis. His works on Jewish theology and Jewish-Christian relations are analyzed by *Maurice G. Bowler* in "C.G. Montefiore and His Quest."

*Alive and Well and Living in America*

At the furthest possible remove from C.G. Montefiore, the left-wing philosopher of Reform Judaism, stands contemporary American Or-

thodoxy. Only a few decades ago, conventional wisdom anticipated that its adherents would remain at best a small, segregated cult.

In his paper, "Orthodoxy Resurgent," *David G. Schnall* points to its growth and vitality today. He describes its self-confidence, its missionary zeal and its vigorous insistence that it alone represents the Judaism of the future. The importance of the subject is obvious.

#### *Spinoza and Mendelssohn – Another Look*

The modern era in the history of Jewish thought is symbolized in the life and thought of two major figures — Spinoza and Mendelssohn — who were radically different in outlook, intent and influence. Baruch Spinoza, who, in one sense, was the culmination of medieval Jewish philosophy, severed his link with Judaism and entered into the mainstream of Western thought. Moses Mendelssohn, the bearer of the heritage of traditional Jewish piety, symbolized the effort of the modern Jew to retain his Jewish identity while entering into Western society.

In his paper, "History and Modern Jewish Thought: Spinoza and Mendelssohn on the Ritual Law," *Michael L. Morgan* calls attention to some unexpected differences in the thought of these two seminal figures on the authority of the Torah and the binding character of Jewish ritual.

#### *Fathers and Children*

A decade has gone by since Saul Bellow's novel, *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, was published. From the vantage-point of the Eighties, Sol Gittleman sees in the novel a manifesto criticizing the youth of ten years ago who were absorbed in their own personal destinies with no concern for society as a whole. Siding with Bellow in his attack on yesterday's "Me-generation" was a whole group of critics who are now in middle age, or beyond, and are the neo-conservatives of today. In this paper, appropriately subtitled "Looking Back on the Crisis of 'Mishpocha,'" the author maintains that, on the other hand, Bellow has not remained stationary but has moved forward to a new type of openness of spirit and liberal concern.

#### *Israeli Writers Look at the Arabs*

The State of Israel is now in its thirty-fourth year, but modern Hebrew literature is considerably older. During the twentieth century, Hebrew writers dealing with Jewish life in the homeland were naturally confronted by the presence of the Arabs. In his paper, "Arabs in Israeli Fiction: A Study in Ambivalence," *Menahem D. Rotshtein* surveys the varying treatment of the Arabs in Israeli fiction during the past five decades. It sheds light on the attitude of Israeli Jews to the Arabs with whom they live.

R.G.

# *The Genesis of JUDAISM:* *A Chapter in Jewish Cultural History*

ROBERT GORDIS

THOUGH UNRECOGNIZED AT THE TIME, THE year 1950, mid-point in the twentieth century, was a watershed in Jewish history, marking a turning point in the development of modern Judaism. The two massive events in the history of the Jewish people, one traumatic, the other heroic, had taken place a few years earlier, yet neither had penetrated into the consciousness of contemporary Jewry in any meaningful sense. The Nazi Holocaust, which European Jews had found unbelievable, was incomprehensible to American Jewry. Not until the 1950s did the slow, agonizing process of confronting the enormity of the "total solution" begin. The existential horror of the catastrophe was intensified as it became painfully clear that Hitler had collaborators in the Allied Powers, who were locked in a life-and-death struggle with him in the Second World War. Slowly and unwillingly Jews had to face up to the fact that the leaders of the free world, well aware of the genocide, did little or nothing to limit or prevent the extermination of six million Jewish men, women and children.

The Nazi Holocaust raised fundamental ethical and theological issues which began emerging in the 1950s. What was the relationship of Christianity to anti-Semitism? What responsibility did the Christian church bear for the rise of Nazism? What could be the relationship of Jews and Christians in the post-Nazi era? What significance could be attached to the interfaith movement?

Even more fundamental were the theological issues raised by the Holocaust. Where was God during the long, drawn-out, inhuman agony of the concentration camps and the crematoria? Is faith a viable option for post-modern man? Is it possible, or even permissible, to forget or to forgive the perpetrators of the most monstrous crime in the history of the human race? These were some of the major questions posed by the Holocaust. The variety of responses to the catastrophe still lay in the future, but the process began in the Fifties.

In 1950, the State of Israel was clearly a viable entity, the miracle of its rebirth having been transformed into the reality of its existence. As is true of every human achievement, the State of Israel confronted its citizens and world Jewry with a host of practical problems both at home and abroad. It also raised theoretical questions scarcely conceived of before. What is the obligation of the Jew living in the Diaspora toward the State of Israel? What are the elements binding Israelis and Diaspora Jewry? What



is the role of religion in a secular state? Basically, the emergence and progress of the State of Israel raised in their starkest form the two interrelated questions that have been the hallmark of the modern Jew since the Emancipation: what is the character of the Jewish people and the content of the Jewish heritage, and what claim does it have upon the Jew?

Clearly, the Holocaust and the Homeland demanded a rethinking of the fundamentals of Jewish and human existence. This was true for the Christian as well as for the Jew. To be sure, Christians might choose to sweep these troublesome issues under the rug, with only a few valiant voices crying in the wilderness calling for reconsideration and repentance, but for Jews the problems have been inescapable.

It is more than a coincidence that the quarterly journal, *JUDAISM*, was launched in 1950, when these issues were just emerging on the horizon. The stimulus to its creation had begun shortly before the end of the prior decade. Today, as *JUDAISM* observes its thirtieth anniversary, it continues to occupy a special niche among Jewish periodicals the world over on two principal counts. First is its special area of concern — Jewish religion, philosophy and ethics, rather than philology, history, politics or sociology. Second is its “non-denominational” character, its pages being open to every school of thought and every individual point of view when expressed with clarity and intelligence. Because its fields of interest have been interpreted broadly, increasing numbers of readers have found *JUDAISM* vital and relevant to living concerns, supplying a background in depth for understanding contemporary issues.

That the journal has enjoyed the unwavering support of the American Jewish Congress has often been an occasion for astonishment. AJ Congress is, by its very nature, a “political animal” concerned basically with the defense of Jewish and human rights in America, Israel and throughout the world. How did a great civic-defense agency become the sponsor of a journal concerned with Jewish religion, philosophy and ethics? The answer is an interesting chapter in the history of American Jewry that reveals the mysterious workings of the human spirit. A religious believer may be forgiven for describing the sequence of events as providential.

As the years move on, many of the participants in the early history of *JUDAISM* depart from the scene. There is, therefore, more than a little interest in setting forth the beginnings of the journal, since errors of omission and commission tend to multiply with the passing of time. Thus, in his moving biography of the enormously gifted Rabbi Milton Steinberg, who died in 1948 at the untimely age of forty-six, Simon Noveck notes Steinberg’s deepening concern with theological and philosophical issues during his last few years. He describes Steinberg’s relationship with Will Herberg, then employed as a publicist for the International Ladies Garment Workers Union: “Herberg had been a Marxist, but had abandoned his radical political and economic faith in favor of a religious affirmation.

When Herberg's article, 'From Marxism to Judaism' appeared in the January 1947 issue of *Commentary*, Milton wrote to express his admiration."<sup>1</sup> Noveck reports that Steinberg encouraged Herberg to set forth his theological ideas, as well as to caution him about "the temptation of taking individual, random and idiosyncratic statements as representative of the Jewish mainstream of affirmation. The work which ultimately emerged was Herberg's *Judaism and Modern Man*."<sup>2</sup>

In a note,<sup>3</sup> Noveck cites a letter by Herberg to Rabbi Hershel Matt: "... [W]e will also make final plans for setting up the theology discussion group that Milton suggested during the summer" and continues:

At one of these talks Herberg suggested the launching of a "journal of theological discussion." Steinberg recommended the names of Jacob Kohn, Jacob Agus, Robert Gordis, Abraham Heschel, Alexander Burnstein, Felix Levy and Judah Goldin as individuals who, he thought, would be interested in participating in such a venture. Nothing came of the idea at the time, but three years later the American Jewish Congress agreed to sponsor the periodical JUDAISM to which so many of the same people suggested by Steinberg became contributors.

As may be suspected, the process by which JUDAISM emerged was neither as speedy, direct or simple as the juxtaposition of Noveck's last two sentences might suggest. The record should prove of interest.

Some years earlier, in 1943, Dr. Louis Finkelstein, President (later Chancellor) of The Jewish Theological Seminary, had invited four alumni of the Seminary, Ben Zion Bokser, Henry M. Rosenthal, Milton Steinberg and me, to present a course on the philosophy of Conservative Judaism, each to deliver six lectures setting forth his individual approach. This course was received with great enthusiasm by the student body and proved a valuable stimulus to creative thinking for the lecturers themselves. Thus, I offered to lecture on the subject the following year without recompense and my colleagues would surely have agreed to do likewise. But all efforts to make them a permanent feature of the Seminary curriculum failed of realization.

As a result of this enterprise, it became clear to me, as it did to Milton Steinberg, that there was need of a journal on Jewish theology transcending organizational barriers, and bringing together all those seriously concerned with these issues. We both discussed the matter and we agreed that the time was ripe for such an undertaking.

There was a second, more personal motive involved. Will Herberg's spiritual odyssey from Marxism to Judaism had attracted widespread attention, both because of its intrinsic theme and its sensational character. Unfortunately, his part-time employment by the union left him in great economic difficulties. Milton suggested, and I heartily concurred, that the

1. Simon Noveck, *Milton Steinberg: Portrait of a Rabbi* (New York: KTAV, 1978), chapter 6.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 322, note 7.

journal which we had in mind could offer Herberg a part-time position as editor or managing editor, so that his income would be raised to a decent level. Then came the tragic blow of Milton's untimely death.

My conviction, however, that a journal in the area of Jewish religion, philosophy and ethics represented the demand of the hour was not weakened and I continued to discuss the idea with friends and associates. At the time, Professor Milton R. Konvitz, Dean of the School of Labor and Industrial Relations at Cornell University, and Rabbi Morris Goldfarb, director of the Hillel Foundation on that campus, had been thinking of a journal of Jewish thought for college students. When they heard of my interest in a similar project, they drove down one summer's day from Ithaca to Camp Tabor in Lake Como, Pennsylvania, where my family was summering. Their idea was to have the journal sponsored by Hillel Foundations and the students to be solicited for subscriptions. I pointed out the practical difficulties involved in setting up the elaborate mechanism for such a solicitation, complicated by the fact that a student's stay on a campus was limited to a few years, so that there would be a constant struggle to build and maintain a list of readers.

Instead, I proposed an alternative. A few months earlier, the American Jewish Congress, headed at the time by Rabbi Irving Miller, its president, and Rabbi David Petegorsky, its executive director, had convened a small "high level" Conference on Jewish Living at Hyde Park, New York, at which were present a representative group of Jewish thinkers and scholars reflecting varying points of view. At the conference it became clear to me that the Congress leadership was casting about for a concrete project which it might undertake to enhance the quality of Jewish life in America. At the meeting at Lake Como, I pointed to this conference and undertook the task of presenting the proposal successively to the various echelons of Congress leadership, the officers, the Executive Board and the Administrative Council. I proposed the name JUDAISM in order to indicate its basic aim of interest, as well as its non-denominational, non-partisan character. After the initial shock of having Congress sponsor a journal devoted to Jewish religion and philosophy wore off, the unconventional idea won the support of the Congress leadership. Above all, it enjoyed the enthusiastic support of the late and great Professor Horace M. Kallen.

But there was one obstacle. After I had won assent to the idea of the journal, I indicated the intention of inviting Herberg to serve as editor. This aroused strong opposition from many of the most knowledgeable members of the leadership. Herberg had been greatly influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr, whose brilliant reinterpretation of classical Christian doctrine had become a dominant influence in American theological thinking. Many Jewish readers of Herberg's writings saw in his approach a Jewish version of Christian theology. Thus, when he submitted his book, *Judaism and Modern Man*, to Dr. Solomon Grayzel, editor of the Jewish

Publication Society, Grayzel wrote that Herberg seemed to “all but accept the doctrine of original sin. It is so completely Christian, not to say Presbyterian, in any case, so unjewish as I understand Judaism, that I was horrified.”<sup>4</sup> The reaction of Petegorsky and other Congress leaders to Herberg was not very different.

I, too, found many of Herberg’s theological positions uncongenial, as was to be the case, years later, with his extreme right-wing political and economic attitudes. Nevertheless, I felt that the opportunity of saving for Judaism a creative and original mind dared not be lost. I continued to press for the project of the journal, with Herberg as editor.

Finally, a compromise was suggested by the Congress leadership. They would accept Herberg as editor of JUDAISM, with one proviso — that I serve as Chairman of the Board of Editors. By working in collaboration with Herberg I would be able to prevent the journal from becoming the mouthpiece of any single coterie or one extreme school of opinion.

The first issue of JUDAISM appeared in January 1952 with the heading, “Will Herberg, Editor and Robert Gordis, Chairman of the Board.” While it cannot be said that there was a stampede by American Jewry to join the subscription list of JUDAISM, the journal stimulated a great deal of creative activity among Jewish scholars and thinkers, young and old, established and unknown. Manuscripts began pouring in and the role of the journal in encouraging creative work and thought in the area of Jewish religion, philosophy and ethics that began then has remained constant and, indeed, has increased through the years.

Meanwhile, Herberg was establishing a national reputation, not merely because of the content of his thought, but because of his personal history in making the transition from Communism to religion. He became a greatly sought-after speaker on college campuses, particularly by Christian groups. He traveled widely, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The stipend which the editorship of JUDAISM brought him became less and less significant, while the editorial duties became more and more onerous, interfering with his new career as a highly successful lecturer. While I was serving in a volunteer capacity, Herberg’s extended absences from New York placed upon my shoulders much of the day-to-day responsibility of editing, from the reading of manuscripts to seeing the journal through the press. My growing rabbinical and academic obligations made this pattern increasingly difficult for me to sustain. Finally, Herberg resigned, and I had the task of seeking a replacement. I then selected Rabbi Theodore Friedman, who served as Managing Editor from 1954 to 1961. He was followed by Dr. Felix A. Levy, who served as Editor from 1961 to his death in 1964, and by Dr. Steven Schwarzschild, who was Editor from 1964 through 1969.

My own interest in JUDAISM remained unabated, but I became less involved in its affairs. My rabbinical activities in Temple Beth El of

4. Quoted by Noveck, *Op. cit.*, p. 218.

Rockaway Park, a growing congregation, and my academic duties as a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary, not to speak of research and lecturing, preempted my time and energy. In 1968, I became rabbi emeritus and was then entirely immersed in academic and scholarly pursuits.

In 1969, when Dr. Schwarzschild resigned the post, an invitation was extended to me by Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld, President of Congress, to become Editor of *JUDAISM*. I stipulated at the outset that my work would be a labor of love for Judaism and a contribution to the over-all goals of the Congress program. Having moved to Manhattan, I was able to accept the position, beginning with the first issue of 1970, and to devote to it the attention and energy that it required.

Through these years, the leadership of American Jewish Congress has manifested the highest type of communal responsibility with regard to the journal. Succeeding Presidents of Congress, Israel Goldstein (1952–1958), Joachim Prinz (1958–1966), Arthur Lelyveld (1966–1972), Arthur Hertzberg (1972–1978) and Howard Squadron (1978–) have scrupulously respected its total editorial independence, besides making available the necessary funds, very modest to be sure, needed to keep the journal alive. Of basic importance has been the generous willingness of writers to send the fruit of their research, thought and labor to *JUDAISM* as their contribution to the vitality and significance of Judaism in the modern world. I have enjoyed the cooperation of a miniscule but highly dedicated and able staff, consisting of Dr. Ruth Waxman, Managing Editor, and Mrs. Trudy Kramberg, our secretary through 1980.

Far more important, the journal has been guided by three basic principles:

1. *JUDAISM* has afforded complete freedom of expression for every significant point of view in contemporary Jewish life: Orthodox, Conservative and Reform, Reconstructionist and secularist, liberal and conservative, Zionist and non-Zionist. Thus, it has been an instrument for the cross-fertilization of ideas, seeking to develop mutual respect in all sectors of the community.

2. *JUDAISM* is geared to the general intelligent reader and not merely to specialists. It believes that Jewish life and thought are, and should be, the concern of all Jews and not the private preserve of technicians and professionals. This goal is reflected in the content and style.

3. *JUDAISM* has encouraged younger writers, scholars and thinkers, both in the academic world and outside of it, to concern themselves with Jewish life. Many of them, not formally involved in the Jewish field, have been led to dedicate their talents to various areas of Jewish culture by the availability of a forum for their research and thought.

Individual articles, by the score, have commanded wide attention and stimulated thought and discussion in many circles. *JUDAISM*, it is safe to say, has made a significant contribution to Judaism.



# Night Train From Milan

DAVID W. WEISS

AT FIRST, SLEET AND SNOW ALTERNATE with rain, and then there are only the white flakes, dense and uninterrupted, and a swirling mist that thickens at the yellow lights' periphery as the carriage ascends the Alps from the North Italian plain below. The train from Milan to Zurich makes slow progress late this Saturday night. The drifts deepen at the sidings, still a dazzling white in their freshness under the stronger illumination of passed station houses. The conductor, on his rounds, surmises that we may have to halt for some time half-way; the tracks have not yet been cleared of the avalanche earlier that day, and debris from high up on the slopes, invisible ahead, still impedes passage. There is danger of a fresh slide.

I read, not with much alertness. Light in the compartment is dim at best, fading every so often, and the slow, rocking motion of the train is hypnotic. The muted click of the wheels underneath and the steadily steepening walls of snow outside create a rhythmic illusion of detachment in time and space. The compartment is cold, cell-like. Almost buried in a greatcoat at the far window, the only other occupant also has a book before him; he appears immersed in its pages with greater attention.

The man is small and nondescript. I notice only later — an afterthought — that his coat, gloves, and hat are elegant. The impression he gives is not; hunched low in his seat, his presence is muted and forlorn.

He was already in his place, removed in his book, when I entered in haste at Milan, hoping to make a plane connection in Zurich for home in Jerusalem, immediately at the closing of the *Shabbat*. The fog below had halted all flights from the Italian city for the past two days.

There has been total silence between us. The sudden question now peremptorily shot at me by my companion in the cell is doubly startling and, although I had not been fully asleep, I am jolted into awareness as from slumber. I glance at my watch; several hours have passed in our journey.

"How do you explain it?" he asks. The emphasis is on the "you."

I wonder, for a moment, whether I had not been sleeping, after all, and had missed an earlier address. Apparently not. His tone, as he repeats the question, holds no suggestion of something preceding. It is apparent that he asks precipitously out of the somnolent vacuum of our confine-

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ment, and although his voice is low, the words are demanding, agitated. To my surprise, they are in Yiddish, the inflection unmistakably Galician. They demand a reply, but in their insistence they also carry a quality of resignation, as if they had been formulated, identically, many times before. I wonder why the stranger assumes that I comprehend the language, and why I know what it is that he asks. He doesn't have to add, as he does:

"The *hurban*, the destruction."

His book has fallen open. Held skewed on his lap in one hand, it is now angled partly in my direction. It is a Hebrew text, an aggadic volume, judging from the title, but one not known to me, and it is clearly very old. The pages are a thick, yellowed vellum, frayed at the edges, and the printed letters are in a large, decorative, and somewhat uneven print. As my eyes adjust to the half-light, the colophon on the bottom of the turned title page is familiar, like that on several of the leather-bound tomes I have from my father. I catch a glimpse of the Latin legend below: LIVORNO . . . IMPRIMATUR. . . FERDINANDO DE MEDICI. . . The decorative coat of arms is, indeed, that which is imprinted on the frontispiece of many of the early 17th Century Jewish treatises in my library, books published in Italian cities when they were forbidden in many other parts of Europe.

In the enclosed silent twilight of our cubicle and in the peremptory recall from the borders of sleep, the question, naked and urgent, conveys more than inquiry. A confrontation.

I find myself unable to meet it, as I have always believed one must. I have held it mandatory to be capable of response to the fundamental questions always there, even when rejoinder can be only partial and tentative. As evidence, at least, of having thought through what matters most. There is, after all, the very long record of wrestling, the incumbency of at least the attempt to know before what one stands. But I fail at the moment, as almost always.

I retreat to obscure platitudes:

"This is, of course, the most basic of all problems . . . theodicy . . . the limits of human comprehension . . . no ready answers . . . one must search the sources for an approach . . . it wasn't God who authored the evil . . . the camps were made by men . . . perhaps, when He turns His face. . ."

As I hear myself, there is the familiar rush of shame. When it is said and done, the professor with the gift of charisma, the Jew who so convincingly integrates modern science and the tenets of Judaism, doesn't really integrate at all. At moments of truth, he waffles, another armchair defender of the faith, secure in the comforts of his own good fortune.

I am aware acutely of the many hours of philosophy in Oxford and Berkeley and Jerusalem drawing-rooms. Brisk replies to similar query — but from people not touched more than I have been. Then, it had been quite easy, the cadenced platitudes. But this one, my grey travel compan-

ion, has been touched. That is echoed in the sound of his question. And facing him now, I ask myself: Has all my learned talk, the papers I have written, been more, in truth, than posturing and self-deceit? Yes, I know how to impress academic apostates with novel compositions: scientific perspicacity and religious scholarship. But then, it doesn't take much to scintillate in vacuums where pain has not entered. Are, then, my supposed insights any more than mannerisms? I know that I am a competent technician, with apt citations from Talmud and Midrash for the uninitiated, something of an interesting hybrid for collectors of the off-beat; I wear my patina of erudition and conviction quite well; I can manage with those who are put off by a straw — what do you say to us, rabbi?

Then, it occurs to me: Perhaps this guilty reflection is pose, too? My interlocutor, wizened in the abrupt glare of a station platform just receding will not let me take refuge in posings.

"You are avoiding my question," he says. "You have thought of these things. Yesterday, I saw you at the *minyan*."

So he had, and I know why I had thought, fleetingly, that I had seen him before as we came under the station's glare. That morning, I had been to the *shetibel*, the small prayer house, in the city. A variegated assemblage, *hassidim*, for the most part. A few Belzer, merchants from London on their way, I gathered, to Paris; a family from Australia to visit the Rebbe of Ger in Jerusalem; several Satmarers, diamond traders from New York; Lubavichers, on mission from the Rebbe in Brooklyn, to start a day school in North Italy; a handful of residents, coming together at the only place in Milan where services are in the liturgy of the Ari.

I was called to the Torah. One of the synagogue's functionaries had said a word of welcome to the scientist from Israel come to participate in the cancer symposium that week, who was also known to him as an occasional contributor to Jewish journals and who had the privilege of a private meeting in the early hours of a recent morning with the Rebbe of Lubavich. Afterwards, at *kiddush*, I was asked to "give a word of Torah." I spoke on the conception of nature in the eyes of Judaism, had argued that in classical Jewish thought there is no room for randomness in the occurrences of nature and in the fate of human beings within the material world. "Nature is the daughter, the hand, of God," I had quoted the *Meshech Chochmah*, Simchah Meir Hakohen of Dvinsk, and then the Ramban: "All that befalls man in nature is part of the wondrous fabric of *hashgahah pratit*, of the individual supervision over each person; the indifference and ignorance of the beholder who perceives only chance, illusion."

"You can't play at studying the living world and at swaying with the *hassidim* through the *amidah* with the *tallit* over your head," my companion persists. "Sometimes, you must have asked yourself questions!"

I demand in turn: "Do you ask this of everyone you see wrapped in a *tallit*?"

An old nun, making her way down the corridor outside the compartments, pauses at the door and looks in. I think, bitterly: Easier for her. For them, it's all spelled out, triumphant; and, in their nostrils, far less of the reek of massed flesh scorched. She disappears down the passage. Daylight has broken, a sparse reflection on the snow like a weak bulb on graphite blackboards. The train has again slowed to a crawl. From a farmhouse, a rooster is giving voice, assertively. I walk to the large window in the pasageway and see the nun stop at the end of the aisle and listen. Then I think, for her, the cock cries betrayal, for me invitation: "Blessed art Thou, Lord, King of the universe, for having given the rooster wisdom to discern day from night."

I say out loud, as I turn back to the compartment, to no one particular:

"There is no escape from the Kingdom."

The man in the coat does not let it stand.

"Ah, but is it?" He is silent for a moment. Then:

"I . . . I have tried to escape. That doesn't go, either." Again, a pause, before he continues, this time as if speaking more to himself than to a listener.

"Once, I learned. When I was young. It was nice, the little school. *Machsike Hadass* — the Supporters of the Faith — in Lemberg. Then I was in Janowska, and in other places. Now I sell stones — *steiner* — very expensive, too, in Italy. In a few minutes, I shall, after all, put away the book. I will take my *siddur*" — he removes a much-used small book from a pocket, soft cover of plastic, like the ones my older sons have with them when they are out on the line, on the Golan and in the Sinai — "and I will say — *Ich well sagen* — *pirkei shirah* 'The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament His handiwork. . . . Earth says, The earth is the Lord's, The fields say, Lord, in wisdom didst Thou create the world. . . The tree says . . . The beasts say. . . ' I want to know why. The glory and the wisdom and the horror. And why I open the books. And why we hold on to the . . . Kingdom. Why? Because it is there? Or because we are so afraid, we cannot live without 'It is there?' Where was the King when the Germans came? And all the times before that. . . . Maybe, no King, no Judge, no judgment? Or maybe . . . He has forgotten, altogether, when he turned His face?" Then, louder, facing me directly: "I ask them all. Now, I ask you."

King, Kingdom. *I remember, years ago on a street in Berkeley, another challenge thrown at me and at the Kingdom. I had been caught up in the Movement, marched in protest against the American war in Southeast Asia and for civil rights, heady with approval of students and colleagues whom I had not earlier had call to know, fascinated by the justice of the cause and by my new self-image. Finally! The years of growing up in a small Austrian town with rather a reputation of Jew-hatred even there, under the growing German shadow from the North, had not favored this — a man of deeds. Yet, at sober moments during the action in California, conscious,*

as well, of a discordant note, of an alienness amidst the bourgeois revolutionary élan. Then, that morning, I found myself part of a group of young professors, outside a bar after a long night's planning of brave new assaults on the university's administration. There had been much political self-searching, each one of us plumbing the depths and nuances of his incorruptible radicalism.

As we broke up, a more senior colleague, a professor of political science, who had frequently, in those months, cast me amused and, I had thought, more than slightly mocking glances, suddenly took my arm and said:

"Who do you really think you are fooling? Maybe yourself – not me! Nice of you to condescend, but you know, you don't really belong! That's all right, too, but you ought to know it yourself. What you really are is a monarchist!" And he laughed and walked away.

I had been startled, but only in part. True, I had more than once voiced frustration in these caucuses, and even antagonism, at the doctrinaire Marxism which seemed to have become so much the domain in which my comrades-in-arms moved. And once, showing that man through my house, I had explained with some pride the pastel drawings of Jewish heads, poring venerably over folio volumes. They were by my mother's father in Vienna, follower of the Kapishnitzer rebbe and the appointed portraitist to the Hapsburg court – Kaiserlich-Königlicher Hofsmaler David Kohn. A man of oddly meshed qualities, whose name I bear. When I was small, my grandmother sometimes took from a velvet-lined case the pin given to her husband by the old emperor in appreciation, the letters FJ I zu KD in diamonds, and she had shown me the correspondence, "Mein geehrter Freund, David. . . .", "Erlauchte Majestät. . . ."

True, I had vaguely considered my Berkeley activism a religious rather than a political imperative. The disenfranchised of the world, the oppressed, the attacked. But, monarchist?

Yet, my reply that morning on Telegraph Avenue had come spontaneously, a reflex:

"Yes, I suppose that's so! Not surprising. I am a Levite. We've been royalists a long time."

It didn't even sound melodramatic then. And afterwards, I had felt good. I continued in the movement, but I believed that I had come to know better just why I was there, and I came to be surprised no longer that I felt curiously out of place, nor to be disappointed entirely when, as war in the Middle East broke out in June 1967, my friends could not manage to extricate themselves from doctrine and apply their lovingkindness to the nation of Israel at the brink of destruction. When a distinguished mathematician turned impatiently to me on the day that the Egyptians closed the Straits of Tiran and said, "Look, it's too bad about the Israelis, but a few thousand more or less. . . . What we are talking about is the national liberation of the Third World. . . . That's what matters! . . . You must agree!" I had wanted to cry: "There are over two million, much of all that's left," and I wanted to hit him – I didn't, I lacked the courage, small man that he was, or the presence of mind – but I wasn't astounded.

Now, in the train compartment, the bitter taste of that unstruck blow



wells up, and the contrast. The Levites were the only loyalists when Moses called to the tribes: "Whoever is with God, rally with me!" and they rallied. Then, at the beginning, the King's guard had drawn sword, stood with their backs to the smashed Calf, and had blotted out the rabble whose knees had bent to the idol. I was very proud of that lineage. Now, I could not even draw words?

The man had removed coat and jacket. He had taken a faded cloth bag from the briefcase on the rack above his head, removed the phylacteries, and was about to don them. He wants to know:

"*Ihr legst oichet tefillin?*" — Do you, too, put on *tefillin* daily?

I say: "Yes."

"He wears *tefillin*, too. Do you know what is written on the parchment of His *tefillin*?"

I knew the *gemarrah*: "Who is like thy people, Israel, one nation on earth."

And then, abruptly, the moment in that isolated journey seems to lift out of the continuum of time, expanding in a vast domain of its own, and reality dissociates into prismatic planes, disconnected from all past trial to capture meaning at intersecting coordinates, each dimension now unalloyed and unencumbered, and I have the sense that, for a limitless instant, perception, forever elusive in false admixture, lies attainable in the simple purity of its components. Drawn along a slant of the prism, it comes to me that in challenging my knowledge of the passage, the man who had sat in the coat and now stands divested of that and of jacket, the left sleeve of the shirt rolled up and the tattooed number plain on his bare arm below the elbow, has also intimated an answer. Not merely reciprocity — "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one . . . And who is like thy people Israel . . . His glory is on me, and mine on Him. . ." More than that. Oneness. Union. Indivisibility.

I face the man. My words come fast now, jumbled in the desire — no, the imperative — to hold thought, to frame it:

"What we read this morning, in the *parshah*, 'And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them' . . . Do you know the *midrash*? 'It is not written "in it," in the sanctuary, but "in them," to teach you that He dwells within each and every person of Israel.' It is peculiar. . . . our God requires the people as dwelling. . . . He demands 'I will be sanctified within the Children of Israel' . . . I saw a book the other day that I hadn't known before. A collection of the *hassidic* masters on the Sayings of the Fathers. The Rebbe of Komarno —"

— and I see in the mirror of memory my other grandfather, the renowned posek, arbiter of Jewish law, of Pressburg, piercing grey eyes and patriarchal in the flow of white beard to the waist of the embroidered craftan, tall in the miniscule living-room behind the grocery in which he earned his living, a chamber still smaller, the few shelves cluttered with the staples of his trade — *povidl*; Russen, small fish and rings of onion in vats of brine; flour; rock salt, ground by hand on

request; jars of oil; thick, hand-made candles — gracious in welcome to uncles and aunts and cousins come for holydays to the city from outlying towns and hamlets scattered in the Hungarian Unterland that had been swept more than a century earlier by hassidism from the East, faces of relatives only dimly recalled but the trivia of small happenings in which they figured, observed or storied, the horizons of my childhood, etched in recollection and become legendary, the vignettes an only bridge to a world extinguished at Auschwitz and Treblinka, whole lands expunged — the Marmoros, Ungvar, Ujfejerto, Debrezen, Nagharol, Kalev, Kaschau, Sziget, Hust — the roster of the ghost communities of Hungary in endless ranks; and the voiceless roll-call out of Slovakia — Topolzan, where my grandmother's grandfather held his first rabbinate and hand-wrote most of his works on halakhah; Suran, where, as child, my father lived for some years with his grandfather, Reb Aaron, head of the rabbinic court, and was woken daily from the age of five with a candle placed next to the straw pallet, a cup of hot cocoa, and the sing-song good-morning, "Bübele, steh auf, mir lernen Toireh, mir hoben viel Arbeit" — Little boy, get up, we must learn Torah, we have much to do — in the not-quite Yiddish jargon of the upland Slovakian Jews; and the shadow cadres from across the border in Galicia — Dukla: When we fled, in 1939, only barely not too late, my father took the pulpit of the Attorney Street shul on New York's Lower East Side, the synagogue better known as "Men of Dukla — Magen Avraham," where he shook off many of the layers of Western sophistication, of what went with a doctorate in classics from the University of Vienna, and spoke to a packed house on Shabbat afternoons, interweaving, somehow, tales of the Maggid of Meseritz, the Dubner Maggid, the Seer of Lublin, with the rigorous Talmudic rationalism of the Chatam Sofer yeshivah of his birthplace, and then, at the Third Meal, leading tunes picked up from Rumanian hassidim in Siebenbürgen. Landesschulrat Herr Professor Dr. Heinrich Hillel Weiss, Oberrabbiner von Wr. Neustadt und Neunkirchen, the still dashing veteran battalion commander who earned the Iron Cross during three years on the Eastern Front with the Honved Hussars in the first war and who, on Shabbat walks, taught his only son aphorisms from Midrash Rabbah and Latin declensions, not overly protesting when the older men competed for shirayim, remnants, off his plate — and Komarno: to where my native Israeli daughter-in-law's father and grandfather and great-grandfather made their way by horse carriage to celebrate the three yearly festivals with the rebbe —

— the Rebbe of Komarno cites the Baal Shem Tov on the opening page of my blond young son's new book, and I repeat it now to my companion in the journey —

"The Rebbe of Komarno said 'Every person in Israel is an organic part of the Shekhinah'. . . ."

The man completes the thought: ". . . and the Shekhinah went into exile with the people . . . that is what you are saying. . . . 'Imo 'anokhi be'zarah,' he quotes the Psalm: 'I am with them in their travail.'"

Pause.

"Yes," he goes on "and will return one day with the people, that is how

Shimon bar Yoḥai reads the text, isn't it? 'And the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity.'"

Yes, that is how. The *tannah* points to the grammatic idiosyncrasy of the Biblical phrase. "Turn" is not given in the transitive verb form which, in the Hebrew, connotes action toward another, but rather in the *pa'al*, which can only imply the return of the speaker: He Himself will return with the people with whom He walked, inseparably, to . . .

"Auschwitz and Janowska, and all the places, in all the centuries," I say. "The *reductum ad logicum* of our exile together."

"I have met in the camps . . . Jews . . . who thought they found Him there," the man says. "Once, at the Umschlagplatz in the ghetto . . . it was late on a *Shabbat* afternoon . . . they were sitting, three young men, they had very long earlocks, and they had with them a tin of water and a piece of bread . . . they were out of it all . . . do you know what they were doing? They sang the songs of the Third Meal, and they used some of the water to wash their hands, and they broke bread. . . . He is a powerless God, today, isn't He?"

"Perhaps He has chosen to be powerless with us, all the years. After we made Him turn away. The King can choose how to be, can't He? Perhaps we must wait until we let Him come back into the world, to know Him King again? When He is banished, there can only be . . . where you have been. And perhaps He has no choice. The alternative, for Him to intervene . . . we would no longer be Man, who can choose . . . then, no more Jews, no more People, no dwelling at all for Him in the world here . . . You know the *gemarrah*, one must give blessing on what befalls, on the bad as on the good . . . perhaps the difference doesn't count for that much, really, when there is the oneness and we carry it together. . . ."

I think: It is true. On our own entirely, we can't make it. The emptiness fills with evil. Force unsanctified. Only He and we can sanctify, but we ourselves cannot, alone. Then the strength we have turns perverse; we devour ourselves. And nature is God's hand when we grant Him dominion. When He must withdraw, that force, too, reverts to chaos, and the sky turns iron.

But the sentences are disorganized, the phrases failing the perception on the plane. The instant of clarity is too fragile, hung suspended in flight like a hummingbird at the lip of the calyx, like so many of my thoughts escaping as they form when I cannot hedge them with words.

But now I slide down another slant of the prism, transversed in the image of the three young men celebrating the Third Meal at the open cattle wagons, and the opening phrases of the *Shabbat Minhah* service, from the prophet, are in my ears "These, my words, that I put into thy mouth shall not depart from thy lips, nor from the lips of thy descendants, nor from the lips of thy children's children . . ." and I remember, also, a haunting tune that we sing in the *Sukkah*. It is a dolorous song, but also assertive and tenacious and proud, the medieval

*recitative of a Sukkot hymn: "Am ani ḥomah . . . bara ka-ḥamah . . . golah ve'surah . . . harugah 'alekhah . . . sovelet sivlakh . . ." the Nation sings I am the wall . . . created like the sun . . . cast out and bound . . . killed on Thee, killed for Thee . . . Thy suffering enduring. . . and another idea takes shape:*

"Perhaps it is an illusion, that our being alive, individually, has . . . has. . . ." The phrasing won't come. I want to say "autonomous significance," but that seems obscure, an academic refinement. I also want to call out,

"When will you set your watchmen on the city?" Instead, I reverse:

"Perhaps our lives are forfeit from birth, and we must live with that. We owe God a death, yes, but it is not without purpose. So that He can remain in the world, and can turn again and return. And in the dying, we live. . . ."

"The King's guard, bound to die when needed?" he half asks, half states.

"Something like it."

Yes, something like it. He was not King, on earth, until Abraham. Then, He was discovered, and crowned. But only for as long as there is witness. And the evidence for the King of Kings must be, cannot be other than unconditional, ultimate.

Another image: *It was the time at dawn for the saying of the shema, and as they tore his flesh with iron hooks Akivah said the words and took the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. His students witnessed the master's execution. They asked, "Our teacher, even to this point?" and Akivah answered, "Now that I shall have the opportunity of fulfilling 'And thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . with all thy soul . . . ' shall I not fulfill it?" The House of Israel, phoenix attestant. Here, choice stops.*

For a few minutes, we are both silent. Then I hear him hum, almost inaudibly, the words of Ezekiel, not unlike the chant of my childhood Seders: *"Ve'ereh lokh mitbosseset be'damayikh, ve'emor lokh be'damayikh hayi, be'damayikh hayi,"* And I saw thee lying in thy blood, and I said to thee, In thy blood shalt thou live, in thy blood shalt thou live. And then, in the original Hebrew, with a laugh which is — cynical? mocking? — I am not sure:

"Surely a bridegroom of blood art Thou to me!"

I say: "Yes."

And still another image of memory: *An evening at a luxury hotel in Herzliyah, where I am with friends on the eve of Independence Day. Earlier that afternoon, we had hiked in the Judean Hills, and at dusk had stopped at the Scrolls of Fire, near Ramat Raziel. There is an especially abundant spread at the buffet, and as we dine we watch the dancers, Jewish tourists in groups from abroad for the most, many in late middle age. They dance with European stateliness. They are having a very good time, there is much laughing, and that particular Jewish vivacity of festival days. Their talk is ebullient — German, Schweitzerish, some English and bits of Hebrew, but the matrix Yiddish, rich and unselfconscious — and even the bluish numbers on the forearms of not a few seem, oddly, decorative.*

*They are only visitors to Israel, but they are visiting home, and in their movement and banter there is an ease that I have rarely seen in Jews outside. When a very large woman, well into her sixties, waltzes by our table and smiles broadly at us, it had occurred to me: They are witnesses. They have survived. They prove something. The German furnaces have also passed, but not the dancing. In the Valley of the Sharon, the dry bones have come alive to dance, and the children of some of them this evening around campfires in Jerusalem's Valley of the Cross, in settlements and in the open places of cities throughout the country. We dance very much now, in the land, as if we must, the cadences of endless journeys have a new rhythm not to be denied. On Simḥat Torah we sway and leap through the streets, the scrolls held high beneath the improvised canopies of tallitot; and on Lag B'Omer, when the tribes gather at Meron. We are here. And the King Lord God of Israel remains in the world of man; He is withdrawn, but yet, He can be encountered. He reigns, even from His concealment, "beseter hamadregot," in the hidden recess of history, and nothing is forgotten. To the stubbing of a finger. And the skeins are spun. To that, too, we are witnesses, and to the ecstasies of the encounters in the Now; to the desire and the yearning that have not dried. I say to the man in the tefillin, again:*

"Yes. But He is a bridegroom, too."

When he is done with the morning service and the phylacteries, wound like the wings of the dove, are back in their pouch, he asks:

"Why do we pray and praise?"

I grope: "Perhaps, because we can't help it."

"Maybe," he agrees.

"Perhaps, too," I add, "for the time we have before the pledge is up. The old Rebbe of Ger once said on Yom Kippur that the 'Now' is transcendent. And then, for Him to be there, too. To know. And for us not to forget. That it is a covenant, a meaning."

"A steep price for that, no?"

"Yes."

Then, to himself: "*Un kein breireh hoben mir nit*" — And we have no choice.

"No," I say, unasked, "He reigns over the people whether it chooses or not."

"And yet, we must always be there to crown Him," he says, again only to himself.

He reaches into his briefcase again, draws out a much smudged notebook, opens to a blank, lined page halfway through, hands it to me:

"Write it down!"

I am startled: "What?"

"What you said, now."

"Why?"

He offers no explanation, but repeats: "Please, write it down!"

I take a pen and try, but as I write I am aware that the spontaneity is gone, the sentences stilted. He is, too.

"That's not how you said it!" He tears the pages out, crumples the



paper, and throws it into the receptacle under the window. "Write it again!"

I make another effort, trying to reconstruct, discarding syntax and structure, trying to recapture accent and nuance. He recovers the pad, skims over the jottings, nods.

"I collect," he says. Then: "*A groisser chidush iss es nit* — great novelty it isn't — *doch, Ich dank eich* — still, I thank you."

There is silence between us.

He is back in his coat, again huddled in his corner, away from me. The slanting planes meld again, as precipitously as they had diffracted, the prism is gone and, after a short time during which I absentmindedly don phylacteries and recite a shortened version of the *shaharit*, I fall asleep, fully. I awaken only when the train lurches to a stop at its destination, Zurich. The man in the corner has gone. I put my head out the window, but I fail to spot him in the throng descending to the platform.

# *Returning to Germany: Forty-three Years Later*

BERNHARD FRANK

To look again at that which wind and rain  
enshroud, to watch the rooftops splice the moon  
and rip the toppling clouds against the grain,  
brings tears, skewed hopes that vanish all too soon  
and open up the floodgates of old pain.  
This journey, though the moment's opportune,  
runs like a paper-cut across my brain  
where I had long considered me immune.  
I think of one last ride atop a cart  
to guillotine, of firing-squad's sharp volley  
and hangman's slipping noose. How shall I rally  
in this new land when far behind, my heart  
like Jews with harps on the Euphrates river,  
hangs back and keens? I look ahead and shiver.

\* \* \*

Mere child when I had left this place, swirled dreams  
of armbands, boots and cries are caught  
even now within my brain; corners fraught  
with swastikas and walls with silent screams.  
The laundromat of time just isn't what it ought  
to be, its cycles, fraudulent, fail to rinse  
the terror from the fabric, and the tints  
of nightmare shadow yet my crumpled thoughts.  
Forty-three thin years ago was carved  
that message on my brain; now to unlearn  
and open up (myself so long unnerved)  
must have its pain; like iodine must burn  
before the healing comes, before the light  
shall tumble-dry the sunshine out of night.

\* \* \*

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The arches of McDonald's curve along  
the *Kaiser Allee*, linden shelter beer-  
garten and discos; yet the turtles of fear  
accost the street, clawing away at the song.  
Now guess: what's blond and blue-eyed and clear-  
complexioned, hollow/brazen as a gong  
(sounded by time & place)? But that's the wrong  
question to ask here. Stand up and cheer!  
I put my best German down in vain,  
in vain I smile — the *Hausfrau* waiting in line  
powders her nose, senses at once the fine  
distinction of a foreigner just off the train —  
out of an old shed the barbed wire  
unrolls; again her world sets me on fire.

\* \* \*

Now lying here, unwinding on my bed  
in Frankfurt, all the ghosts beyond recall  
worry out of stone, break free like sweat  
from paper roses on a sterile wall.  
All day, an x-ray plate, off strangers  
I'd capture auras sharp as whip or boot:  
nothing changes — only rearranges  
above the stubborn leasehold of the root.  
Is it something in the gait? the hips?  
something round the eyes? about the mouth?  
A record drops, the needle once more slips  
into old wounds and memories cry out.  
They scale my head with pick-ax swastikas,  
converting sheets to soap, and air to gas.

\* \* \*

(für die Negerin am Main)

My first thought was, she's a prostitute,  
in her old lamé pants and scanty top,  
perfect-painted mask and hair aflop,  
and the Eiffel-tower heels on which she stood.  
And when she turned to speak I expected to hear,  
"Ya wanna have a real good time?" in English,  
or German, or Esperanto. Instead of which,  
she spoke in French, her eyes full of tears,  
and sought directions to the Dresdner Bank.

Clearly every German had shied away  
 from this lady of the night during the day.  
 "Merci, merci." No, no need to thank  
 an outcast Jew for speaking your language.  
 One and the same — the Esperantos of love and anguish.

\* \* \*

This is what I had hoped for when I arrived  
 back in my native land: To put behind  
 the pain of leaving, eradicate from mind  
 all those now still, who should have been alive.  
 Yet when they saw my hair and wit were dark,  
 my stature short and, true, my eyes eclipsed,  
 they seized my space, their hands put at their hips  
 and set their dogs at me (just for a lark).  
 At twilight from a near-deserted park,  
 pursued by punks in motor-cycle gear,  
 I fled back to my room, crumpled by fear,  
 one hand on my passport and my German Marks.  
 I laid these assets numbly at my side,  
 lay on the bed naked; circumcised.

\* \* \*

Counting the hours, my memories and my fears,  
 I sit in the millionth-and-one *konditorei*,  
 stuffing myself like a true German. (There  
 the similarity ends.) Yesterday  
 I went to see *Caligula* which, ads  
 insisted, held a parallel to Hitler:  
 a make-believe pornography, it had  
 a plot so childish, its horrors so much littler  
 than anything that "holocaust" implied,  
 it set the audience to necking in the bath  
 of ketchup-blood. Bring out the *bones* that hide  
 within your past, bring out the bones of wrath,  
 set them on the screen and let *these* speak.  
 Then put the ketchup on your *Schnitzel*, and eat!

\* \* \*

Till now I've spoken German with a relish:  
 "Look," I said, "how I belong." Wrong.  
 I am a tourist here, don't speak the tongue.  
 "*Entschuldigen Sie, ich spreche nur Englisch.*"

I sip my *Apfelsaft* (instead of beer)  
 inundated by more German puke  
 spewing out of the American juke-  
 box (the very puke that once brought tears,  
 nostalgic, to my eyes and suddenly,  
 some forty-three long years after the fact,  
 I realize the insight I had lacked  
 (or blocked) — What they had done to *me*. To *me*.  
 Goddamn. I spit upon the German Reich.

And I sat at the Burger-King and cried.

\* \* \*

I have retraced my past, relived in small  
 the trauma of the baffled child; I sense  
 the nature of the beast through clearer lens,  
 adapt. Heaven is nowhere. After all,  
 I know that home is no nirvana either  
 (*so much there is chaos and neglect*)  
 and that here too there is much to respect  
 and marvel at. Nor am I altogether  
 blameless — I tend to prick and tease (it's true,  
 I brought Amichai and Singer on this trip).  
 Henceforth, to make my truce, I pledge to keep  
 my distance — this is no country for a Jew;  
 yet since all life's a matter of degrees —  
 so be it. I *think* I've made my peace.

Buffalo, 6/1/80

Frankfurt, 6/3 — 6/6/80



# *The Trials of Sarah*

ADRIEN JANIS BLEDSTEIN

BEAUTIFUL WOMEN ARE OFTEN MISTRUSTED and condemned in folk literature. Helen's loveliness destroyed the lives of many heroes; Circe turned men into beasts; Delilah betrayed Samson to his foes. Indeed, one must search among less familiar myths of the Western world to find a live, enchanting woman upon whom a man can rely. Dante's Beatrice, a diaphanous vision of loveliness, was, after all, dead.

This trend in literature makes all the more noteworthy the presence of a woman who was at once both dangerously attractive and yet retained the confidence of her husband. Sarah, matriarch of the Hebrews, presents an image different from other legendary heroines. Fresh examination of familiar Biblical stories uncovers a more positive relationship, a mutual one between the sexes, than most post-Biblical commentators have recognized. In the founding of the people, Israel, Sarah's trials were as severe as Abraham's.

Legend tells us that Sarah was a captivating woman. For example, in the *Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I*, each part of her body, from head to toe, is described as excelling all brides in radiance, daintiness, and perfection. With all her physical charm, she is wise as well as lovely. This description is consistent with the Biblical report, though in the Bible her beauty is mentioned only briefly and her wisdom illustrated through her actions. The Bible focuses on character, and the tests of Sarah's character assume importance when her choices are set against an ancient Egyptian story which shares a remarkable similarity, yet offers a contrast in heroic types and world views.

The triangle of discarded husband, alluring wife, and all-powerful Pharaoh in the Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers" parallels the triangle of Abraham, Sarah, and Pharaoh in the Biblical episode. In the "Tale of Two Brothers," the Egyptian lady conspires to kill Bata, her husband, because she prefers the Pharaoh. In the Biblical narrative, Sarah exposes herself to adultery to keep her husband, Abraham, alive. Both stories address the wariness of men toward beautiful and potentially treacherous women.

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*Sarah and Abraham*

At the urging of God, Abraham leaves Haran with his wife to go to Canaan, the rugged crossroads between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Encountering a famine in Canaan they journey further south toward Egypt. As they are about to enter the land of the Pharaoh, Abraham says to Sarah,

“Look, I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘She is his wife!’ and they will kill me, but let you live. Please say, therefore, that you are my sister, so that it may go well with me on account of you and that I may retain my life thanks to you” (Genesis 12:11–13).

The Egyptians do find Sarah captivating and the Pharaoh takes her into his harem. We are not told how long she dwells there, but we do know that Abraham fares well, acquiring both animals and slaves. However, the Pharaoh and his household are afflicted by plagues, and the Pharaoh realizes that his adultery with Sarah has brought on this misfortune. Though he chastizes Abraham for the deception, the couple are sent away unharmed, with all the possessions that had been acquired in Egypt. The tale is brief.

To some tastes, Sarah’s behavior is scandalous. She agrees to put herself in a situation which includes an adulterous relationship. In those days polygamy was common among wealthier men, polyandry was forbidden, and adultery was considered “the great sin” throughout the ancient Near East. Yet, Sarah and her wary husband come away from Egypt blessed with wealth.

The Yahwist or J, a master storyteller, told this first episode. An Elohist narrator, known as E, revised the episode to answer the moral doubts arising from J’s brevity and candor. Yet a third narrator brought together the present arrangement of the stories.

In E’s version in Genesis 20, the pair are travelling in southern Canaan and again Abraham claims that Sarah is his sister. King Abimelech takes her but, before he can touch her, God warns him in a dream not to lie with her, since she is another “master’s mistress” (Genesis 20:7. This is the only time throughout Genesis that *baal*, master, is used to designate husband. The Yahwist prefers *ish*, man). Although Abimelech is not punished, he demands to know why Abraham would bring so horrendous a guilt upon his kingdom. Abraham explains:

“I thought there is surely no fear of God in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife. Besides, she is in truth my sister — my father’s daughter though not my mother’s — who became my wife” (Gen. 20:11–12).

Though it was later a taboo, marriage between half-brothers and sisters was permitted in that period. Furthermore, the wealth bestowed upon the pair when they left is considered proof that Sarah was a virtuous woman.

In this later rendition of the tale, E identifies the plague visited upon the sovereign and his household — barrenness.

Why was the “master storyteller” J unruffled by the ingredients of deception, possible adultery, and compensation found in this tale? He presents individuals in crisis, in survival situations where continuation of life takes precedence over the taboo against adultery. And we see that Sarah’s determination to present herself as a marriageable sister is particularly noteworthy against the backdrop of the “Tale of Two Brothers.”

There is much in Genesis to justify this comparison. The Hebrews were intimately involved with Egyptians.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the legends in Genesis explain the origins of the Hebrews, their noble lineage, how they became honored guests in Egypt and then were ruthlessly enslaved. Among their intentions, the legends illustrate how different the Hebrews were from the Egyptians.

*“The Story of Two Brothers”*

In the first episode, Bata, the young and handsome hero, is accosted by his brother’s wife, as Joseph is by Potiphar’s in Genesis 39. Bata refuses and the rejected woman accuses him of molesting her. A miracle protects Bata from his brother’s vengeance. Convinced of Bata’s innocence, the brother then kills his faithless wife and casts her body to the dogs.

The hero then settles in the Valley of the Pines where he places his heart on top of a pine tree which, when cut down, would mean his death. The gods pity Bata’s loneliness and create for him an enchanting companion, more lovely than all the other women of Egypt. However, the goddesses who determine fate doom her to die by an executioner’s knife.

Bata loves his wife and confides his vulnerability to her. By means of magic, her braid is carried down the Nile to the place where the Pharaoh’s clothes are washed. It is then discovered among the reeds. Pharaoh desires the woman who possesses such a braid and Bata’s wife is persuaded to enter the royal harem. The Pharaoh loves her and wants to know how to kill her husband so that she might become first lady of Egypt. She divulges Bata’s secret and the Pharaoh orders the tree cut down.

A prearranged omen discloses the death of Bata to his brother, Anubis, who must now search for his brother’s heart, soak it in water, and restore Bata to life. After four years of searching, Anubis finds the heart, revives Bata and the brothers are happily reunited. Bata then transforms himself into a magnificent bull that Anubis takes to the Pharaoh, who rewards him richly for the fine creature. Like Abraham leaving Egypt, Anubis returns home a wealthy man.

Bata-the-Bull reveals his identity to his former wife. The alarmed

1. For a discussion of the Egyptian scribal influence on the Yahwist, see E.W. Heaton, *Solomon’s New Men* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), pp. 129–161.

woman gets the Pharaoh drunk and seduces him to do her will. She requires the bull's death, but, miraculously, two drops of the bull's blood are transformed into two trees. Bata-the-Tree then mocks the woman's efforts to destroy him. The terrified woman again prepares a feast for the Pharaoh who reluctantly permits destruction of the marvelous trees.

As the trees are being chopped down a splinter flies into the mouth of the lady and she is impregnated — with Bata! A son is born to her and he grows up to be ruler in the Pharaoh's place. The new Pharaoh calls together his counselors and tells his lifestory. The doomed woman who had been Bata's wife, and afterwards his mother, is then executed, bringing the story to a close.

The Bata story literally bristles with intense hostility between the sexes. Man despises Woman both as wife and mother. The storyteller so fears man's vulnerability to feminine charm that the women remain unnamed, not even to be remembered as individuals. In contrast to this anonymity, which is an expression of the fear of the feminine in the Egyptian imagination, women in the Biblical narrative are specifically named and their individual characters are clearly etched.

Biblical Hebrews did not fear beauty in women. Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Bath-Sheba, each is described as beautiful. Yet none is condemned. In the Egyptian story, Pharaoh is smitten with the beauty of the lady who is judged responsible for the death of Bata. By contrast, David fully accepts responsibility for his actions in regard to Bath-Sheba and Uriah, and Bath-Sheba is neither blamed nor cast aside. The beautiful daughters of Job's later years are honored with mention of their names and are given equal inheritance with their brothers.

Apparently Hebrews conversant with stories from surrounding cultures had reason to fear alien women, if such women indeed behaved as their own native folk tales portrayed them. Potiphar's wife acts precisely as does Bata's sister-in-law; Queens Jezebel and Athaliah, both Phoenecians, are ruthless toward their subjects, as is their goddess Anat. The *ishah zarah* and *nakhriah* refers to a woman who "forsakes the intimate companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God" (Proverbs 2:17). She might be an alien with different values from the Hebrew or she might be a Hebrew who has rejected the ways of the Covenant and, thus, can not be trusted.

But one observes in the Bible that being foreign, like being beautiful, does not necessarily mean temptation and danger. Although the Moabites were especially despised because their women seduced Hebrew men in the wilderness, Ruth the Moabitess is accepted and revered after proving herself a worthy daughter-in-law to Naomi.

The most intense hostility expressed in the Bible occurs between brothers who compete for their father's favor, blessing, and inheritance: Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers. The struggles between men and women in the Bible are between individuals who share

common aspirations. Rebekah is remembered for both her beauty and her guile. Nevertheless, her purpose is not solely to wrest power for herself, but to ensure that the destined son will carry his father's blessing. In order to become a mother, Tamar seduces Judah and she is ultimately recognized by him as more righteous than himself.

The desire and hate of man for woman that is shown in "The Tale of Two Brothers" can also be found in an ancient Egyptian love song:

How well the lady knows to cast the noose  
yet still escape the cattle tax.  
With her hair she throws lassoes at me,  
with her eyes she catches me,  
with her necklace entangles me  
and with her seal ring brands me.<sup>2</sup>

Contrast this with a stanza with similiar imagery from the "Song of Songs":

You have excited my heart, my sister, my bride;  
You have excited my heart with one of your eyes  
With one bead of your necklace.  
How fair is your love, my sister, my bride!  
How much better is your love than wine (4:9–10).

Here the man unequivocally enjoys the presence of his beloved; he is drawn to her and not threatened by this desire.

The passion expressed throughout the *Song of Songs* typifies the intimacy between Sarah and Abraham. Trust and mutual pleasure distinguish the union of Sarah and Abraham from their Egyptian counterparts.

### *Sarai Becomes Sarah*

The episode in Egypt is Sarah's first trial of her faith in a shared destiny with Abraham. She could have been truthful and Abraham might have been killed, as was Bata. Ironically, Sarah's intrigue grows out of her fidelity to Abraham. A second trial is yet to come.

Ten years after settling in Canaan, Sarah is still without a child. Abraham has done nothing to acquire a second wife, the typical solution for a wealthy man in his society. Sarah takes command, directing Abraham to take her personal maid Hagar (an Egyptian slave woman) as concubine. Perhaps Hagar will bear a child whom Sarah could nurture. When Hagar does become pregnant she is insolent toward her mistress who becomes indignant. The law is clear. A slave who bears a master's child is still a slave, though the offspring could be adopted by the wife and treated as her own. When Sarah confronts Abraham, "YHVH judge between me and you," (Gen. 16:5) Abraham acknowledges Sarah's sovereignty over Hagar and his unborn child. Too proud to remain a servant of

2. William Simpson, ed., *Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 324.

a harsh and barren mistress, Hagar runs away, but an angel of God speaks to her in the wilderness and tells her to return and submit to Sarah's abuse. Her inferior social position is clearly established and she acknowledges the truth of it. Hagar returns to her mistress.

The master storyteller was not particularly sympathetic to Hagar. However, even she, a slave woman who must accept an intolerable situation, is consoled by God. In contrast to the unnamed women of the Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers," Hagar is immortalized.

J's narrative affirms Sarah's place as Abraham's wife regardless of her capacity to bear children. Indeed, her realization that YHVH is her judge ends the second trial to her faith — and, eventually, her infertility. Years after Hagar has given birth to Ishmael, a priestly narrator tells us that God changes the names of Sarah and Abraham from Sarai and Abram. God tells Abraham, "She shall give rise to nations; rulers of peoples shall issue from her" (Genesis 17:16). *Sarah* is the feminine form of *sar*, meaning ruler.

The Elohist narrator ignores Sarah's trials, her choice to link her destiny with Abraham and her cognition that YHVH alone is her judge. Apparently E was disconcerted by Abraham's disregard for his child and attempted to rationalize this lack of paternal feeling. In this version (Genesis 21:1–21), at the weaning celebration for Isaac, Sarah is disapproving of Ishmael and orders Abraham to cast out the youth and his mother. Sarah is ambitious for her son and ruthless toward Hagar and Ishmael. Abraham is distressed but God commands that he do whatever Sarah tells him. It is through Isaac that his line will be continued.

Depicting Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness, the Elohist narrator evokes sympathy for the lad who is dying of thirst under a bush and for his weeping mother who does not want to see her child die. In this poignant moment, God speaks to her, promising Hagar that her son will be the progenitor of a great nation.

In E's narrative there is little character development; the emphasis shifts from the women to the founding of the Hebrew nation. How different Sarah appears in J's version. She had completed the second trial to her faith when she overhears YHVH tell Abraham that in the coming year she would bear a son. This woman of ninety years chuckles to herself, "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment — and my husband so old!"

The Almighty acknowledges the humor of the situation and with great tact and consideration exclaims to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying: 'Shall I really give birth, old as I am.' Is anything too wondrous for YHVH?" And when Sarah, in fear, denies laughing, the Almighty speaks directly to her. "Nay, but you did laugh" (Genesis 18:9–15).

The focus of the episodes of J, the master storyteller, is on the character of Sarah. Entering the harem of Pharaoh, she is determined to keep Abraham alive. While barren, she nevertheless succeeds in present-



ing Abraham with an offspring through Hagar, her servant. In anguish over Hagar's subsequent insolence, Sarah calls out that YHVH be her judge. Such are her trials.

Thereafter, the miraculous birth of Isaac fulfills Sarah as mother and matriarch of the promised nation. She lives thirty-seven years after his birth. When she dies, Abraham takes care to buy burial land, a cave where he, too, will finally rest with his lifelong companion (Genesis 23).

In contrast to the Hebrew narratives, many legends among ancient Near Eastern polytheistic people give evidence of men's fear of the female. The animosity toward wife and mother that we witness in the Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers" is an imaginative defense against the powers of woman's seductiveness and fecundity.

Such anxiety may be evidenced in Babylonian legend as well: In the Gilgamesh Epic the voluptuous goddess of love, Ishtar, invites Gilgamesh to make love to her. Denying her, the hero responds that she has destroyed each of her lovers in turn. And, in the Babylonian Creation Epic, the god Marduk shoots an arrow that pierces the heart of the warring mother-goddess, Tiamat. From her carcass Marduk creates the world. The staging of this epic yearly suggests its cathartic appeal.

As we consider these myths of the ancient Babylonians and Egyptians, it is remarkable that the Yahwistic Hebrew narrative of Sarah and Abraham is void of hostility toward the female as wife and mother. Belief in YHVH enabled man to view without fear woman as an equal. Faith in YHVH enabled woman, no less than her partner, to meet trials and to make choices affecting her destiny and that of the Hebrew people.

# *The Dilemma of Women's Equality in the History of Reform Judaism*

RIV-ELLEN PRELL

THE REFORMERS OF 19TH CENTURY EUROPE sought a bold transformation of Judaism. They were committed to an authentic but changing and developing religion. Their vision was directly the product of 19th century Emancipation of the Jews in Western Europe which created Jewish citizenship in the secular world, making education and cosmopolitan life accessible to increasing numbers. Legal emancipation institutionalized the 18th century ideology of Enlightenment which was committed to progress, modernity, secularism, universalism, and gender equality.<sup>1</sup> The implications of liberalism and the Enlightenment for women in Judaism have proven problematic. In selecting an emancipation model for addressing the problem of gender, that is, in seeking legal equality, classical Reform eroded the only status that Judaism has offered women, legal uniqueness. Hence, they made women invisible as they made women equal. They constructed a vision of women which would forever mirror its "host culture" rather than creating one that was unique. The solution became the problem. The failures of an Enlightened Europe to equalize women's status became a Reform failure, as the failure of American aspirations for gender equality remains a Reform failure.

The impact of the Enlightenment on Jews in the 18th century was profound. Reason and humanist universal values threatened to replace Judaism as the focus of life for a growing number of Jews (*maskilim*). In such a system the individual, rather than the group, became the point of orientation. "Neutral human spheres," as Jacob Katz characterizes them, enabled increasing Jewish/non-Jewish contacts around books and ideas in a common socio-cultural milieu, and the enforced isolation which had previously solidified the Jewish community was undermined.<sup>2</sup> The marriage of the world views of Judaism and the Enlightenment was not a simple one. Universal values which create neutral human spheres pull adherents in different directions from the traditional and legal requirements of an intensely communal, Orthodox Judaism. Reform Judaism was born in a milieu of broadening interaction with Gentiles, new freedom for Jews, and increasing possibilities for assimilation and secularization.<sup>3</sup>

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1. See J. Blau, *Modern Varieties of Judaism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966).

2. J. Katz, *Tradition and Crisis* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), pp. 254-257.

3. See J.M. Cuddihy, *The Ordeal of Civility* (New York: Delta Books, 1974), for a discussion of

In the 1830s and 1840s the Reformers wrote with eloquence and pathos about the state of Jewish life that they beheld. Assimilation was rampant; knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish life was minimal. Most Jews, at least in Germany, had only the barest attachment and interest in religious life. The Reformers saw their task as the salvation of Judaism, to wrest it from decay and to restore it to an authentically Jewish form which was sensible and appropriate for both the modern era and the European cultures in which it had to survive. In no sense did they see their task as making Judaism "easier," or encouraging people to relinquish observance. They sought to draw Jews back to their religion, not to part them from it.

Their analysis of why Judaism was an unattractive and even incomprehensible religion for 19th century Europe lay in its "Orientalism." Orientalism included those outdated, undecorous, particularistic and legalistic practices and beliefs of Judaism which developed through the historical rabbinic interpretations of the Bible and the construction of legal codes in the Talmud. These interpretations constituted an illusory authority, Reformers argued, because they claimed the tradition was unchanging, and could not acknowledge contemporary cultural demands. Orientalism was the common problem behind such diverse issues as the disturbing lack of pleasing western music in the traditional prayer service, and the onerous observance of numerous Sabbath prohibitions concerning travel and the use of lights. The false authorities of Judaism, David Philipson claims, were the twin evils of "rabbinism" and "talmudic casuistry," that is, the traditional reliance on historical rabbinic legal decisions to determine behavior in modern culture.<sup>4</sup> Occidental Judaism, more compatible with the Christianity of Europe, held the Decalogue and the Bible to be the only authorities for Jewish life. They claimed that this more "authentic" Judaism, rooted in "God's word" and freed from rabbinic interpretation, was a prophetic, universalist, and spiritual religion which would offer a "light to the nations." Its "simple truths", James Heller argued, were more appropriate to a world moving toward "brotherhood, universal democracy and rational goals."<sup>5</sup>

The most debilitating feature of an Oriental Judaism, the Reformers claimed, was that it dichotomized the life of its adherents between an onerous, complex, unaesthetic, and alienating religion, and a modern, aesthetic, and appropriate secular education and nation. One's life was forever out of synch; one's religion constantly separated one from the Occident. Nowhere was the Orientalism of Judaism more apparent to the first Reformers than in the synagogue, and it was the customs and

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the "costs" of the Enlightenment for Jews.

4. D. Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism* (London: MacMillan Company, 1907), p. 25.

5. J.G. Heller, *Isaac Mayer Wise, His Life, Work, and Thought* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1966), p. xiii.

etiquette of the synagogue, including the treatment of women in prayer life, to which they first turned their reformation. What the Reformers proposed was, simply put, to make the synagogue and its ritual "decorous," a word whose positive connotations were as powerful as the pejorative connotations of Orientalism. The decorous service that they sought was one that resembled the Protestant services of Europe. Prayers there were spoken in unison; music was western. Order and calm were everywhere apparent, as they were not in traditional Jewish services.<sup>6</sup> From 1844-1846, three rabbinical conferences occurred in Europe whose intentions were to establish consensus on a number of Jewish reforms in order to realize these aspirations. Participants approved the use of the pipe organ, the addition of the choir, increased use of the vernacular language in prayer, and shortening the Sabbath service and Torah reading.<sup>7</sup>

### *The Status of Jewish Women Reformed*

If the synagogue represented the center of Orientalism in Judaism, then Reformers believed that the treatment of women in synagogue life was at the heart of that Orientalism. Philipson writes:

In man's complete assumption of all public religious functions the Oriental origin of the synagogue was apparent. The gallery, to which woman was relegated, was a survival of the Oriental notion of women's inferiority.<sup>8</sup>

Reform took up the problem of women as part of its larger concern to purge Judaism of its Oriental antecedents. In short, the traditional religious treatment of women which was ascribed to Judaism's oriental strains, was an embarrassment, wholly out of keeping with a modern religion. The customs of sequestering women in a separate gallery of seats, out of sight of the service and of male worshippers, of not counting her presence toward a prayer quorum, and excusing her from certain religious obligations were characterized by the Reformers in the 1840s as "barbaric" by Rabbi Chorin,<sup>9</sup> "degrading" by Rabbi Geiger,<sup>10</sup> and "inconsistent" with her position in the family where she was "queen of hearth and home," by Rabbi Wise.<sup>11</sup> Later interpreters of Reform called it "inequitable"<sup>12</sup> and "repugnant."<sup>13</sup> Both the segregation of women in prayer, and their "inferior legal status" in Judaism were simply inconsistent with an Enlightened society.

6. R. Prell-Foldes, "The Reinvention of Reflexivity in Jewish Prayer: The Self and Community in Modernity," *Semiotica*, Vol. 30 (July, 1980).

7. See Philipson, *Op. cit.*, pp. 202-272.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 354.

9. Cited in W.G. Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism* (New York: World Union for Progressive Judaism, 1963), p. 252.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 253.

11. Cited in Heller, *Op. cit.*, p. 570.

12. Cited in Plaut, *Op. cit.*, p. 252.

13. Philipson, *Op. cit.*, p. 355.

At the Reform conference in Frankfurt in 1845, Rabbi Samuel Adler brought up the problem of the status of women in the debates on the Liturgy Commission's report. He requested that the commission support his resolution that there be no religious basis for the exclusion of women from instruction in public services and from counting her within the required number for conducting a service.<sup>14</sup> He and Rabbis David Einhorn and A. Adler were directed to draw up a report for the next commission where the subject would be taken up at length. Their much-praised and reprinted six point resolution was presented at the 1846 Breslau conference. They believed their resolution to be in line with the Sage Rabbenu Gershom, who, in the year 1,000, revolutionized Jewish law by prohibiting bigamy and requiring a woman's permission for divorce.<sup>15</sup> Rabbi Einhorn prefaced the report with a major statement which reviewed the whole subject of the position of women in Judaism and her inferiority in public religious functions.<sup>16</sup>

Einhorn presented the six points which "as much as possible" should end the unique legal status of women. Three of the six points of the resolution were devoted to ameliorating inequity in status between men and women. Hence, women would, first, be newly obligated to perform all religious acts depending on fixed time.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, they were obligated to identical responsibilities for children as men,<sup>18</sup> and third, they were obligated to participate in prayer and, hence, count in a prayer quorum.<sup>19</sup> Their legal autonomy is noted in the fourth point, the refusal to continue the rights of husband or father to release a woman from vows. Fifth, the age of religious majority for both girls and boys was fixed equally at thirteen. Finally, the morning prayer which blesses God "who has not made me woman" was abolished, since some rabbis regarded it as the basis for the discrimination which necessitated the resolution.<sup>20</sup> Rabbi Sally Priesand notes that only the separation of sexes during worship and encouraging women to take leadership roles were excluded from this document.<sup>21</sup>

14. Ibid., p. 261.

15. Plaut, *Op. cit.*, p. 254.

16. Philipson, *Op. cit.*, p. 309.

17. Traditional *halakhic* Judaism frees women from the positive *mizvot* which tie adults to time-bound duties, such as the central prayer *shema* recitation, wearing the prayer shawl, or binding phylacteries to the arm and hand. Women must observe all negative *mizvot*, with minor exceptions. Non-time-constrained positive *mizvot* are also required, again with the exception of biologically specific ones, and others concerned with less predictable issues like procreation or the study of Torah.

18. Men have obligations for their sons' religious development, from school age to their majority, when boys take on the obligations to observe religious requirements.

19. Because women cannot be obligated to participate in public activity, like the public recitation of the *shema*, they are not counted toward the required number necessary to constitute a prayer quorum of ten for the daily recitation of certain prayers, and for removing the Torah from the ark to read it on three days of the week.

20. Plaut, *Op. cit.*, p. 255.

21. See S. Priesand, *Judaism and the New Woman* (New York: Behrman House, 1975).

Though many writers about women and Reform have cited this impressive if limited resolution, none whom I have read go on to note the line which follows David Philipson's thorough report of the Breslau Conference, which is the source of most English citations of the conference. "Unfortunately this important and interesting report could not be discussed owing to lack of time. It was merely read at the last session but one (sic)."<sup>22</sup> The resolution was never discussed, let alone passed; its measures were instituted by some individual synagogues in Germany. As central as the status of women was, there were few topics in the Reform program less discussed or formally acted upon.

The reason why this paradoxical approach to women developed so early in Reform lies in the construction of the Breslau report, focused entirely on legal status. In the preface to the report, the committee argued that the plight of women was identical with that of the Jews themselves prior to their emancipation. The aspirations of women were complicated because the Reformers stated that, in the inappropriate formulation of the tradition, they could not even complain. Despite assurances of their "capacity for emancipation," women remained unemancipated because "it was believed that God Himself had pronounced the damning verdict over her."<sup>23</sup> The Reformers' commitment to the equality of woman's status through the transformation of her legal disabilities paralleled the transformation of the legal status of Jews through European Emancipation. But, as both the Jews of Europe and Jewish women discovered, there is more to citizenship than laws.

The formulation of women's status in legal terms was doomed to failure in the developing Reform movement. *Halakhic* (legal) transformation, the traditional Jewish means of change in religious practice, was not to be the religious program that the Reformers ultimately would use for the articulation of their principles and goals, for the concept of *halakhic* obligation would have no viable place in Reform ideology.<sup>24</sup> Religion was no longer a matter of law. Reformers understood the legal problems that a woman faced in traditional Judaism; they never anticipated those that she would face once Reform was established because they lacked an alternative language in which to address the "problem of women." I will argue that conceptualizing gender equality for Reformers meant freeing a Jewish woman from her unique legal status. But the only way to understand women thereafter was in terms of the culture in which Reform Jews lived, in which gender equality never existed. Women persisted in a public religious invisibility that was inexplicable in the face of their "emancipation." Legal transformation was no solution.

The early emancipation that Reformers proposed for women was not only doomed to failure because of the language with which it was articu-

22. Philipson, *Op. cit.*, p. 309.

23. Plaut, *Op. cit.*, p. 253.

24. I owe this insight to Professor David Ellenson.



lated, but was less revolutionary than may first appear. They simply wanted Judaism to "catch up" with Europe, where a German feminist movement and a women-dominated social services movement were developing.<sup>25</sup> The proposals of classical Reform paralleled German feminist demands for "freedom from oppression" and "their own exercise of critical judgment."<sup>26</sup> Feminism and Reform both embraced the Enlightenment commitment to progress, democracy and universalism. Jewish women may have been even more susceptible to the ideas of the Enlightenment and modernized more rapidly because they were so much less the object of traditional Jewish concern. These women found in modernity "a social and intellectual status denied them . . . within the confines of the traditional Jewish community."<sup>27</sup> Judaism, the Reformers were aware, had already begun to lose women who tired of compartmentalizing their religious invisibility from their increasing social visibility.<sup>28</sup>

It is also possible that 19th century German feminism may have been attractive to the very bourgeois Jewish women whom the Reformers envisioned as the "new daughters of Israel." Karen Honeycutt has argued that, in Germany, in the latter half of the 19th century, class lines were drawn sharply and co-operation in the German women's movement between working class and bourgeois women was almost non-existent, more blatantly so than in any other country in Europe. She attributes this to the discriminatory enforcement of legislation forbidding women's political involvement against the working classes. German working class feminists were socialists. Bourgeois feminists were in the Women's Movement.<sup>29</sup>

Though the Reformers took no actual vote on the Breslau report, women's status was altered to some extent by *de facto* synagogue decisions legitimated by Breslau. The limited extent of religious change in women's lives and the minimal attention paid to women after Breslau, despite the desire to catch up with Europe, are striking. A "customary" inequality between men and women persisted. In every case, I believe, that inequality is the result of a cultural milieu which made women's visibility awkward and inappropriate.<sup>30</sup> Reform ideally made it possible for a woman to be more equally a Jew at home and in the synagogue. She had already made gains in the modern world as a result of religious emancipation. Reform

25. E. Rabin, "The Jewish Woman in Social Services in Germany," in Leo Jung, ed. *Woman* (New York: Soncino Press, 1970).

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 176, 181.

27. C. Baum, et. al., *The Jewish Woman in America* (New York: Plume Books, 1977) p. 19.

28. M. Kaplan, "Bertha Pappenheim: Founder of German-Jewish Feminism," in E. Koltun ed., *The Jewish Woman* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), p. 153.

29. See. K. Honeycutt, "Socialism and Feminism in Imperial Germany," *Signs*, Vol. 5. (Chicago, 1979).

30. A discussion of the history of attempts at Women's ordination and the integration of seating in Reform may be found in E. Umansky, "Women in Judaism from the Reform Movement to Contemporary Jewish Religious Feminism," in R. Reuther and E. McLaughlin, eds., *Women of Spirit in the Jewish and Christian Tradition* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1979), and R. Prell, "The Vision of Woman in Classical Reform Judaism," in S. Heschel, *Women and Judaism* (in manuscript).

promised to be an emancipator of women in religion and failed, despite the alteration of legal status. How did the Reformers explain that failure? One can infer, at least by the debate on women's ordination, that their explanation was that "social conditions were inappropriate for equality." For the Reformers, the ultimate failure to integrate women, though it was not a failure that they would have readily noted, lay neither with Jewish law nor with their views on women. These had been reformed. In transforming women's status they had no systematic or intrinsically Jewish explanation for the failure of emancipation.

### *The Emancipation Model*

*Halakhah* maintains what I call an intrinsically Jewish explanation for the difference between male and female status in Judaism. In a modern apologia, Moshe Meiselman formulates a *halakhic* response to feminist critiques of Judaism. He argues that Jewish law provides different but complementary paths "through which each individual tries, in his own unique manner, to achieve closeness to the divine source."<sup>31</sup> The path for women is one of "privacy," and "inner directed striving" (*tzniut*). The private spiritual act is enjoined for both men and women, but for women it is *the* approach to the divine as the public is for males. Hence, a woman makes a Jewish home and enables her husband and son to pursue study. "Enabling," Meiselman argues, is seen by the Talmud as an act greater than "performance" itself.<sup>32</sup> Women's lives are played out on an inner stage; men's lives are lived in the public realm. Equality is not to be sought if it implies undifferentiated participation.

Rabbi Saul Berman argues against seeking a single or unified view of the position of women in Jewish thought.<sup>33</sup> There is an absence "of any single attempt to formulate a general principle governing the status of women" by Talmudic sages.<sup>34</sup> He argues, rather, that any attempt to understand the condition of women must acknowledge that "womanhood, within Jewish law, constitutes an independent juristic status, shaping to varying degrees every legal relationship and being characterized by a special set of rights and duties determined extrinsically by law rather than contractual agreement."<sup>35</sup>

According to *halakhah*, what makes women unique in general, is their creation by God as beings of privacy, and that privacy, hypothetically at least, is secured in a unique legal status which frees them from significant public and communal religious requirements enjoined on men. When the

31. M. Meiselman, *Jewish Woman in Jewish Law* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1978), p. 62.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

33. S. Berman, "The Status of Woman in Halachic Judaism," in E. Koltun, ed., *The Jewish Woman*.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 118-120.

35. S. Berman, *Op. cit.*

Reformers proposed women's equality as part of their program, they simultaneously transformed women's status, and the base and foundation on which she was integrated into Judaism. In Reform Judaism women no longer had a unique legal status, as that uniqueness was, in part, the creation of the Orient so abhorrent to Reform. Yet, without a unique legal status women had no identity in Judaism, and no explanation existed either for them, or for men, why they persisted in private roles as wife and mother in the religion.

David Philipson argues that the Oriental conception of women's religious inferiority was condoned in the *Shulchan Aruk* (the title of the most popular compendium of rabbinical law by Joseph Caro), but that was no rationale for its continuation. He writes, "But do the paragraphs of the *Shulchan Aruk* on the position of women express the view of modern man? This is the only test."<sup>36</sup> The test of modernity required a new legal status for women, to "emancipate" them, like the Jews of Europe, to become full Jewish "citizens." In short, Reform Judaism created a new status for women; they were legally male, undifferentiated by law, obligated — to the extent that obligation was relevant — by all that men were, both in public and in private. Modernity and social conditions provided the only test for what women should be in Judaism; the Enlightenment's answer was women's visibility and the slow accretion of legal rights. But the failure to achieve visibility and public status other than in a family pew, indeed, the very symbol of 19th century woman's civil status — wife — had no explanation. Women's lives were still lived in the family, still as enabling spouses, dedicated to sons and social causes, still absent from study and prominence in the synagogue. Reform Judaism had no religious explanation for a persistent female invisibility other than the test of "the view of modern man."

I am arguing that the transformation of women's legal status within Judaism made them "men" within a culture where achievement of dominant male status was impossible. Ironically, the very cultures which gave impetus to equalizing women's status limited the extent of that equality. Hence women were, of necessity, partial "men." Freed or stripped, depending on one's perspective, of a unique legal status as Orthodoxy provides, women became invisible. They were legally entitled to a visibility which they could not achieve precisely because of the "test" of a patriarchal modernity which did not envision real gender equality. Certainly one could still find visions of women in the Bible, inconsistent and rough-drawn as they were. But Reform Jews relied on their host cultures for their real visions of women.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps that is why it has been only with the advent of modern feminism that Reform organizations have noted and attempted, with limited success, to reform the invisibility of women in

36. Philipson, *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

37. See C. Baum, et. al., *Op. cit.*, p. 41 for examples.

synagogue offices, the governing bodies of the movement, and its seminary.<sup>38</sup> Women's ordination waited for the 70s as well. When the host culture offered feminism, the Reform movement was finally able seriously to consider implementing its 1840s ideology.

I do not believe that the Reformers created this same problem for men, though the Reform program, without question, minimized all laws concerned with gender, de-emphasized sexual imagery and symbolism, and retracted the mirrors which reflected gender status. Their program was universalist, but, in its inability to integrate women, Reformers shared the white male bias hidden within universalism. Barbara Noble<sup>39</sup> addresses this issue in an analysis of Hegel:

(For Hegel) men inhabit the civil order. . . . Women, to fulfill their half of the dialectical bargain, exert influence over the realm of the family. Her metaphysical self violates the sanctity and maturity of universality. Hers is a private or individual legacy to (her son), in contrast to the father's which is public and potentially universal. Her legacy promotes in him a tension between his own development as a familial individual and the requirement of . . . public society. Women cannot in themselves express universality, rather they appropriate and embody the particularistic.

The Enlightenment vision expresses the Western and modernized version of humans as separating public and private, and universalism and particularism, and Reform followed that split closely. In legal terms, Reformers plucked women out of the private. In social terms, they maintained them there. In religious terms, they purged Judaism of a private legal status which provided a unique role for women in any substantial sense, and left their identities to the cultures in which they lived where the public was, for the most part, the male domain.

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38. Priesand, *Op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

39. B. Noble, "Sexual Politics and Theorizing: Toward a Deconstruction of Anthropology," MA Paper, University of Minnesota, Department of Anthropology, 1978.

# *The Tragedy of Bourgeois Cosmopolitanism: On Martin Buber's Politics*

NORMAN LEVINE

## A STUDY OF MARTIN BUBER'S POLITICS

leads to the problem of the relationship between ethical idealism and political power. The liberation of the Jew, according to him, is to unfold primarily in the cultural and spiritual realms. Buber perpetuated the bourgeois cosmopolitan hopes of many nationalist leaders of the early 19th century, who anticipated that the universal acceptance of the principle of national self-determination would bring about a mutual respect and a sense of community among all nations. But the history of Europe in the later 19th and the 20th centuries dashed these hopes. Like those earlier nationalists, Buber failed to appreciate the economic and political causes of oppression and domination. Political cosmopolitanism is always based upon an ethical and cultural utopianism, and tends to neglect the more intractable politico-economic structures of domination. The failure of Buber's politics arises from the fact that his universalist ethics blinded him to the realities of political power. For Buber, God is the ontic datum: God touches all human experience, individual and social. Buber's politics, therefore, reflected his religious humanism and was distinctly cosmopolitan. In essence, his political cosmopolitanism provided the social corollary of his religiously based ethical universalism. He never abandoned the ideal of political ecumenism, and he remained a political utopian.

Buber's political ecumenism, derived from the covenantal theme of God's election of Israel, proved unworkable and impractical when confronted by the wars of national liberation in the Near East. The solution of the Jewish problem there did not follow the bi-national or federated accord that he advocated. Zionism did not culminate in ecumenism but, rather, in a traditional nation-state. The revolutionary movement of the Jews negated Buber's cosmopolitan hopes.

Buber's politics carries an enormous religious burden. In fact, one major theme of his theology of Judaism is the centrality of the political ideal in Jewish life. As Buber interprets the Old Testament, the acceptance of Yahweh as God and the consolidation of the twelve tribes into a

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national political entity were simultaneous. This simultaneity provides the pivotal theme of two of Buber's principal works, *The Kingship of God* and *Moses*.

The peculiarity of the Sinai Covenant is the acceptance of a divine theocracy: The King of the Jews is to be God, who had brought them together in national unity.

The paradox of every original and direct theocracy, that it involves the intractableness of the human person, the drive of man to be independent of God, but for the sake of a commitment, to God, already appears in the Sinai covenant.<sup>1</sup>

Israel became a theo-political unit, with its existence grounded in obedience to God's word. It is impossible, therefore, to separate the religious from the political in Judaism. The meaning of the divine theocracy lies in the willingness of the Jews to take God as King, which entails a willingness to take God's commandments as law. Conversely, destruction of that obedience entails their destruction as a national entity.

According to Buber, the idea of peoplehood is inseparable from the metaphysical foundations of Judaism: "they became Israel only when they became partners in the covenant of the God."<sup>2</sup> In essence, the covenant is "sacral-legal,"<sup>3</sup> imposing obligations upon Israel — the responsibility to fulfill the word of God. The covenant, thus, is not an act of divine grace that demands no human reciprocity, but a mutual act that requires fulfillment of the law.

Community forms not only a religious ideal of Judaism but also a social ideal for Buber. In his more openly political writing, he clearly emerges as an anarcho-communist. An adherent of A.D. Gordon, advocate of the *kibbuzim*, Buber perpetuates the tradition of communitarian socialism: for Buber, community exists inherent in Judaic theology and so, too, must community be inherent in Jewish social life.

Just as it is impossible to separate nationhood from Judaism, so it is impossible to separate land from nationhood. Territoriality, Jewish land in Palestine, can not be detached from the faith of Judaism, for it was a Sinaitic promise. "Only in association with this earth and with this land can the people be what they are meant to be: 'a blessing'."<sup>4</sup> Buber stresses the reciprocity between man and God: "Only in the realm of perfect faith is it the land of this people."<sup>5</sup> God led and, as a King, promised Zion to the Jews. The fulfillment of the covenant can take place only in Zion, which God deemed to be a reward and blessing for the perfection of the sacral-

1. Martin Buber, *The Kingship of God*, trans. Richard Scheimann (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 138.

2. Buber, *Moses* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 112.

3. *The Kingship of God*, p. 125.

4. Buber, *Israel and Palestine*, trans. Stanley Godman (New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1932), p. 22.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

legal divine promise. But only by living in the covenant are the Jews entitled to enlandisement in Palestine.

Historicity constitutes another principal idea in Buber's theology. Process, progression, evolution are all concepts consistent with his idea of God. Judaism, for Buber, is essentially a religion of historicity, which stresses that the consummation and perfection of God's creation takes place within the temporal process itself, and does not proceed from the supra-temporal.

The creation was given, but it remains incomplete. Materiality and man came into existence, not as finality, but as an opening to the future — the beginning of history. Creation offers possibility. Man was created in freedom. He was created as activity and as self-determining, for only as an autonomous being can he partially participate in decision, can he co-operate in the unfolding and succession of history. To collaborate in the movement of time, the human must be subjected to anxiety, ambiguity, and tension. Such existential ambivalence forms the burden that the human must carry in order to achieve the dignity of a subordinate partner in the continuity of creation.

For Buber, the seminal theme of human participation in creation defines man's responsibility and his greatness. History has witnessed the conjunction — the cooperative endeavor of divine and human action. Buber maintains that the chief meaning of the divine-human relationship is "that YHWH wishes to work through the independence of man created as independent and to continue His work on earth by these means."<sup>6</sup> Man functions as a secondary, constitutive agency. As such, the divine decision that creation be a continuous process means that the determinations of human action are subordinate, but important, in constituting the future in accordance with God's will.

The Jewish messianic vision proved distinctly historical, and an out-growth of human action. The kingdom of God in Judaic thought is, according to Buber, that historical state in which human decision corresponds perfectly to the will of God. But the power to effect such a correspondence results from the cultivation of human capabilities. The Kingdom of God is the perfection of man.

In short, Jewish messianism is non-eschatological and non-apocalyptic. The condition of the kingdom in Judaic theology will not descend or be given by a supra-temporal force, as it will in Christianity. For the Judaic tradition, it is not a question of God's having willed man to be free. Rather, God wills that his kingdom come into being only as a result and consequence of human choice. Man exists as free because his freedom forms the first condition of the kingdom.

The ideas of the covenant-community, of the human-divine conjunction in continuing creation, symbolize the continuity between the religious

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6. Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950), p. 129.



and the political in Buber's thought. He consciously and intentionally relates himself to the revelation of covenant-community and human-divine conjunction. He bears the burden of theology willingly, for it places him directly in contact with the mosaic revelation. During the twentieth century, this Kingdom of God remained Buber's political ideal. When he centers his political thought on covenant-community he consciously attempts to make the sacral-legal manifest in the present age. He fulfills a prophetic role: he announced to his contemporaries the same theopolitical message that the ancient prophets had announced to the tribes of Israel. Since the message of the Bible is eternally true, it illuminates the political problems which Buber faced in his lifetime.

Buber wanted a reborn Jewish state in Palestine to become the redemptive center of the world — a model for all the nations. Just as, in the moment of election, God had chosen Israel to lead the nations of the world, so Israel, in 1948, was again to assume the burden of leadership. The humanism of the Judaic religion, the ethical universalism of the Judaic faith, was to be made the predicate of modern Jewish politics. Judaic monotheism had to become the basis of political cosmopolitanism. Ethical universalism and political cosmopolitanism were to be the hallmarks of the Zionist movement and, later, of Israel. Buber wanted the covenant reborn, for only a covenantal Israel was a Biblical Israel and, therefore, Israel. Only in this way could Israel again experience its origination, its elections, its conjunction with the divine as the redemptive center of the world.

Buber did not believe in pacifism. He accepted war and even murder as sometimes necessary, and he understood the use of, and need for, political power. For him, however, "Power without faith is life without a meaning."<sup>7</sup> He objected to the exercise of political power only when it was divorced from morality. The state must not become an end in itself. To make the state an absolute means to place it in a position formerly held by God. "Formulated in a sentence, it means roughly that public regimes are the legitimate determinants of human existence."<sup>8</sup> Above all, Buber was opposed to messianic nationalism which, he felt, would sever the nation from the sources of morality.

A common theme appears in Buber's conception of power, state and nation: No secular entity should displace the sovereignty of God. Clearly, he thought that, during the twentieth century, this displacement had become the basic cause of western decadence. Power, state, and nation had taken upon themselves an eschatological intent. Seeking to keep Biblical existence alive, Buber prefers a theocracy — the conjunction of religion and politics.

Buber's association with Zionism began in 1898 when he first met

7. *Israel and Palestine*, p. 142.

8. Buber, "The Validity and Limitation of the Political Principle," in *Pointing the Way*, trans. Maurice Friedman (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 213.

Theodore Herzl. In the same year he addressed the Third Annual Zionist Congress in Basle. He hoped that Zionism would remain free of the disease of western decadence, and that, as in the past, Jewish nationalism would again act as a redemptive example for the West. Zionism was to be an agent for the regeneration of western culture.

Specifically, Jewish nationalism must not deteriorate into messianic nationalism; must not be absolutized. Buber never tired of reminding the Jewish people of the uniqueness of their nationalism. The rebirth of the State of Israel could take place only upon the condition of the simultaneous rebirth of the covenant. It is impossible, according to him, to separate Jewish nationalism from morality. The Jews are a nation only when they live in the sacral-legal. No Jew has a right to claim that the Jewish nation in itself carries a messianic mission.

Other European nationalist or socialist movements have claimed that their particular national or social ideal came closer to perfection than any which had ever existed. Zionism, for Buber, makes no such claim, but maintains that the Jewish people are worthy of imitation to the extent that they act morally, i.e., fulfill the covenant. Their leadership rests on their actions — their moral deeds. For Buber, Jewish messianism meant, in his day, what it had meant for Moses. The Jews would redeem the world by their own decision and their own choice.

Zionism and Judaic civilization, for Buber, held a dual regenerative function. First, Zionism has a messianic mission. After the achievement of its nationalistic purposes, Zionism must overcome nationalism and work towards a cosmopolitan politics. Zionism should also contribute to the regeneration and renaissance of Jewish life. On this point, the Jewish renaissance must witness a "return to the linguistic tradition of our classical antiquity."<sup>9</sup> Hebrew must be made the language of the Jewish people. Second, the Bible and its values must be made the center of Jewish life. The "human patterns demonstrated in the Bible"<sup>10</sup> must again become the basic forms of contemporary Jewish existence. Third, there must be a transformation of Jewish social existence. Buber did not want the Jews slavishly to copy Biblical models, but to recapture the spirit of Biblical life in the materiality of the contemporary world. Specifically, the Jews must once again discover nature and labor, for the commercial and mercantile occupations into which they have been impressed for many centuries have distorted their nature.

The test of Zionism, then, was its relation to the Arabs. If the message of Hebrew Humanism was correct, Zionism must not imitate the pattern of other national-liberation movements. The settlement of the Jewish people in Palestine must not lead to bitter and violent national or racial conflicts. This commitment was to provide the central test of Buber's

9. Buber, "Hebrew Humanism," in *Israel and the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), p. 221.

10. Ibid.

cosmopolitan politics. He did not wish to see a separate Jewish state come into existence in Palestine. Rather, he preferred a bi-national state that would unite Arab and Jew. Only in unity could there be "community among creatures" and the ethical basis of the Judaic religion be fulfilled.

Buber wanted the Jews in Palestine to set an example of brotherhood and political ecumenism. Nationalism and religious differences need not lead to war. He expected the Jews to demonstrate the possibility of transcending messianic nationalism, to illustrate how to progress to bi-nationalism and political catholicity. By living as brothers with the Arabs, the Jews would fulfill their elective mission.

Buber stressed that there were deep bonds between Moslems and Jews, both of whose civilizations were parts of the Eastern world and shared the common purpose of seeking unity coherence in life. This common purpose provided the basis for dialogue. Arabs and Jews, meeting on the soil of Palestine, had an opportunity to forge a synthesis of Western and Eastern civilizations.

It was not to be. Yet, Buber's cosmopolitan politics did not simply fail: it was inherently an impossibility. For the Jews in Israel to have pursued the utopian politics derived from Buber's ethical universalism would have denied to them the national state that they have come to equate with their liberation and, indeed, with their very survival. Buber remained blind to this political fact because, in his theology, he could never accept the ultimate claims of a particularity, a nation, as distinct from the universal, mankind. He could not sever the particular from the universal, much less agree that the particular could have the greater claim.

His political failure derives from his adherence to culturalism. He was ultimately dedicated to, and ultimately wished to preserve, the ethical universalism of Judaic civilization. He believed that it is only in the realm of the spirit that man achieves his fulfillment, that only in the realm of religious culture man achieves authentic existence.

Buber never came to grips with the realities of the revolutionary nationalism of the Jews. Based on the common experience of oppression, connectedness and unity exists among the oppressed peoples of the world, but no such connectedness exists between the oppressed and the oppressor. If, in the course of a national liberation movement of the Jews, the primacy of political independence replaced the primacy of cultural catholicity, Buber judged such a replacement to be corroding and destructive of the foundations of Hebrew humanism. According to him, a national liberalism movement conducted on the principle of the primacy of politics lacked all ethical justification.

Buber's cosmopolitan politics sought to bring about the unity of man and man. He slighted the differences and struggles between classes, as well as the struggle among nations for domination. The call for the unity of man in spite of class and national differences deflected attention from the material and social causes, consequences, and meaning of exploitation

and oppression. As such, cosmopolitanism exposed itself as a bourgeois vestige that concealed the social dimensions of inequality. Buber's unification of culture took place in the realm of spirit. Political and social unification was secondary. But what can cultural unification mean, apart from the struggle against the oppression of classes and nations?

Thus, the political thought of a justly respected and admired philosopher who dedicated his life's work to the cause of freedom and brotherhood ended in impotence. One of the reasons for the failure of Buber's political ideal was his failure to understand the nature of emancipation as, for example, Marx understood it. For Marx, emancipation can be achieved only by removing the universal causes of oppression, the primary one being economic, inclusive of the political, domination. Therefore, emancipation, for Marx, can begin only in a *praxis* directed toward removing the universal political causes of domination. Buber inverted the Marxian paradigm: what was primary for Marx was politics; what was primary for Buber was culturalism. Indeed, culturalism could be a weapon in the political struggle, but it could not, in itself, become the ground of emancipation.

Buber's rejection of revolutionary nationalism, even in its bourgeois form, exposed the futility of a politics based on theological idealism. The Jews, to whom he looked to redeem the West, as well as themselves, had survival on their minds and, with it, the creation of that traditional nation-state, complete with power-politics. From the perspective of 1947-48, in a world of nations and power blocs, universal political emancipation of the Jews could be achieved only by revolutionary nationalism — Zionism.

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11. I have dealt with the theme of Judaism and revolutionary nationalism in other essays which have appeared in JUDAISM. For two of these which concern the relationship between Judaism and Marxism see, "The Jewish Revolution is not Complete," JUDAISM (Spring, 1974) and "The Necessity of a Jewish-Marxist Dialogue," JUDAISM (Winter, 1976). Also refer to the essay "The Colonial Image and the Jew" which appeared in *Bibliothek Rosen-thaliana*, (University of Amsterdam; Winter, 1975) for a more extended treatment of the colonial image.

# What Is A Jew?

JAKOB J. PETUCHOWSKI

THE QUESTION, "WHAT IS A JEW?" MUST be distinguished from the more frequently asked question: "Who is a Jew?" The latter is a question arising out of current political debate. Posing it has already led several governments of the State of Israel to the very brink of a fall. The question allows, of course, the giving of a variety of different answers. There is the "traditional" answer which insists that a Jew is any person born of a Jewish mother, or one not so born, but admitted into the Jewish fold by means of the accepted rites of religious conversion. There is the official Reform Jewish answer which emends the "traditional" answer by dispensing with some essential steps in the traditional conversion procedure. There is the non-religious Zionist answer which is unconcerned with religious niceties, and which would regard affiliation with, and commitment to the Jewish "nation" as sufficient. There is the Nazi answer, enshrined in the Nuremberg Laws. There is the sociological answer which would regard as a Jew someone so regarded by the environment.

It is clear, then, that the answer given to the question, "Who is a Jew?" depends upon the ideological commitment of the respondent. To the extent, therefore, to which different ideologies co-exist on the contemporary Jewish scene, to that extent a uniform answer to the question, "Who is a Jew?" is bound to elude us. History will have to give the answer in retrospect. Those of today's Jews who will have Jewish grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be considered by future historians to have been Jews.

In other words, it is easier for the historian than it is for the participant in the debate to decide the issue. That is why the past can, at the very least, serve as a guide to a determination of what Jews were in the past, what it was, that is to say, that made Jews, Jews. Consequently, the question, "What is (or, perhaps, better still: What *was*) a Jew?" is antecedent to the further and more debatable question, "Who is a Jew?"

It is, then, to the question, "What is a Jew?" that we would address ourselves here.

There is an ancient prayer, known already to the Talmud,<sup>1</sup> which was originally intended for the Day of Atonement, but which subsequently

1. B. Yoma 87b.

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became a part of the daily liturgy,<sup>2</sup> which stresses the insignificance of human achievement and the futility of human effort:

What are we?  
 What is our life?  
 What is our piety?  
 What is our righteousness?  
 What our help?  
 What our strength?  
 What our might?  
 What can we say before You, O Lord our God and God of our fathers?  
 Are not the mightiest men as nought before You?  
 The men of renown as though they had never been?  
 The wisest as if without knowledge?  
 And the men of understanding as if without intelligence?  
 For so much of their doings is confusion;  
 And the days of their lives are as vanity before You.  
 Man's advantage over the beast is nought,  
 For all is vanity.

The last sentence, a quotation from Ecclesiastes (3:19), sums up the existential predicament of man, and would be acceptable to any follower of Sartre or Camus. But the Jewish prayer does not stop there. Instead, it insists that the meaninglessness of human existence can be, and has, in fact, already been transcended. The prayer goes on to say:

Nevertheless, we are Your people,  
 The partners of Your covenant,  
 The children of Abraham, to whom You made an oath on Mount Moriah;  
 The seed of Isaac, his unique son, who was bound on top of  
 the altar;  
 The congregation of Jacob, Your firstborn son,  
 Whom You loved, and in whom You rejoiced,  
 And whom You, therefore, called Israel (the "fighter for God")  
 and Jeshurun (the "upright one").

The prayer we have quoted is, as it were, an ancient Jewish attempt at self-definition. It defiantly asserts that the malaise induced by human insignificance can be overcome by the affirmation of one's Jewishness. And that Jewishness is seen from the perspective of its three components. Jews are the children of Abraham, the seed of Isaac, and the congregation of Jacob. Each component stands in need of further elucidation.

"The children of Abraham." Scripture assigns a dual role to Abraham. He is, at one and the same time, the first determined monotheist, breaking his ties to family and environment, while embarking, at the behest of the One God, upon a journey of unknown destination; and he is the first "Hebrew." Yet he is not only the first "Hebrew." He

2. Cf. Joseph H. Hertz, ed., *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book*, Revised Edition (New York: Bloch, 1948), pp. 26-30. The translation is our own.

is also the first of a whole band of monotheists who are to transcend the racial and national boundaries of the Hebrew people. Abraham is to become "the father of a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17:5).

It is well known that the Apostle Paul, in his missionary efforts, built upon this conception of Abraham as the "father of a multitude of nations."<sup>3</sup> But Paul was not alone in this. Judaism, too, knows that one can become a "child of Abraham" without having been born a Jew. A proselyte to Judaism once experienced difficulties uttering the opening line of many of the traditional Jewish prayers, "Our God and God of our fathers." The proselyte reasoned that his own fathers had been idolators. How, then, could he address the One God as the God of his own fathers? He communicated his difficulty to the great Maimonides; and Maimonides assured him that he could, by all means, use the customary invocation of "Our God and God of our fathers," since he, the proselyte, through his conversion to Judaism, had become a "child of Abraham." For Abraham had been a great missionary, bringing many "under the wings of the Divine Presence."<sup>4</sup> To this day, when a proselyte to Judaism is called to the Torah during the synagogue service, he is called as *ben abraham abhinu*, a "son of our Father Abraham."

What all that means is that the fatherhood of Abraham is not confined to his physical progeny. Abraham also has spiritual children. All true monotheists belong to his spiritual family. To be a Jew, then, means — among other things — to be a member of this wider "family" of monotheists, some other members of which are not of Jewish birth. To be a "child of Abraham" commits one to three affirmations: (1) that there is an *idea content* in Judaism, the "idea" being that of the One and Unique Universal God; (2) that adherence to, and championship of that idea is not restricted to those who are born of Jewish parents; (3) that the messianic fulfillment of history will entail a world in which all of humankind can be considered as "children of Abraham."

In short, when the Jew prayed: "We are the children of Abraham," he affirmed monotheism, universalism and messianism. To be a Jew meant to be a believer.

"The seed of Isaac." "Seed" is a very physical, biological term. Jews are not merely a philosophical society of ethical monotheists. Jews are also a *mishpahah*, a family. And families are distinguished by ties of blood as well as by shared memories and mutual care and concern. Emphasizing "ties of blood" has fallen into ill repute in today's egalitarian society. Some people are almost ashamed to own up to their lineage and aristocratic descent, because the very necessity and fully justified "equality before the

3. See, for example, *Romans* 4:13ff.

4. See "Maimonides' Letter to Obadiah the Proselyte," in Isadore Twersky, ed., *A Maimonides Reader* (New York: Behrman House, 1972), pp. 475f.



law” has been bowdlerized into the unwarranted “sameness of all the citizens.” Moreover, the terrible and obscene misuse to which the Nazis have subjected the notions of blood, race and descent has caused a certain wariness and a highly apologetic stance on the part of modern liberals, Jews included. But since when has the *misuse* of any idea been allowed to discredit the idea itself? The fact of the matter is that, in the past, Jews have never shrunk from considering themselves to be the physical, biological “seed of Isaac.”

That, after all, is what “Jewish peoplehood” is all about. Jewish “peoplehood” is but another name for the large and extended family, the *mishpahah* descended from Isaac. This “peoplehood” has nothing whatsoever to do with, and it antedates by centuries and millennia, any modern definition of nationhood, statehood, nationality or race, most of which go back no further than the nineteenth century.

Jews have managed to exist under any number of different forms of political organization. They have been members of nomadic clans, a settled population in a Jewish monarchy, exiled communities in Babylon (by no means all members of which were ready to return to the ancestral homeland when the opportunity of doing so was presented to them!), Jewish patriots in Roman-occupied Palestine, Roman citizens adhering to Judaism, an intellectual élite in Muslim Spain, pariahs in medieval ghettos, Germans (or Englishmen or Frenchmen or Americans) of the Jewish Faith, members of a persecuted folk in eastern Europe, citizens of an independent State of Israel, and citizens of the modern free democracies. The political forms of Jewish existence have varied over the millennia. But the self-awareness of being the “seed of Isaac” has remained constant.

Like all other families, the extended Jewish family would also be burdened with the occasional skeleton in the closet. Not every member of the family has lived up to family expectations. And like many — though by no means all — families, the Jewish family has welcomed outsiders into its midst, and has treated them and their offspring as full members of the family. True, the “admission requirements” were specified and not left to chance or subjective impulse. But, in the process, some earlier barriers, such as those stated in Deuteronomy 23:4, were more or less tacitly overcome.<sup>5</sup> It is not only the Bible itself which, in Ruth 4:13ff., names a Moabite woman as the matriarch of the family into which King David was born, but Tradition, too, claims non-Jewish ancestry for such outstanding master-builders of Rabbinic Judaism as Rabbi Akiba<sup>6</sup> and Rabbi Meir.<sup>7</sup> So much for confusing Jewish family pride with modern racist theories!

The newcomer to the family is made to share that pride. And pride it undoubtedly is. Traditional Jewry was very much aware of *yihus* (lit. “genealogy”), a word which is shorthand for “eugenics in the service of the

5. Cf. B. *Berakhoth* 28a.

6. Cf. *Sepher Yuhasin Hashalem*, ed. Filipowski, p. 75.

7. Cf. B. *Gittin* 56a.

family tradition.” It mattered very much to whom one was married, for — contrary to modern egalitarian notions — Jews have always believed that factors of heredity, as well as those of the environment, determine the intelligence and the character of their children. It mattered *whom* one married, and it mattered *how* one married. While the Jewish definition of a “bastard” has always been more liberal than that of other legal systems (if the parents, though unmarried to each other, *could* have entered into a valid Jewish marriage, the offspring is *not* a bastard), *tohorath hamishpahuh*, the “purity of family life,” has nevertheless figured both as a legal demand and as an ideal to be striven for.

Pride in being of the “seed of Isaac” was nourished by memories of a shared history as well as by shared religious commitments of a most daring kind. The shared history was not invariably one of suffering and persecution. Contrary to what one is led to infer from many a medieval and modern presentation of Jewish history, there have been extended periods of tranquility and creativity in Jewish life. But, of course, there have also been those other periods for which the figure of “Isaac, bound on top of the altar” has been prototypical, and which have heightened the feeling that the members of this family must come to one another’s aid, that “all Jews are responsible for one another.”<sup>8</sup>

So much for the shared history and the shared memories. The shared religious commitments amount to nothing less than the assertion that the very belief in monotheism, with all of its explicit and implicit universalist ramifications, is dependent for its vitality and viability upon the continued existence of the “seed of Isaac,” the family of Israel.

“You are My witnesses,” the Prophet had said in God’s name to the people of Israel, “that I am God” (Isaiah 43:10). And the Rabbis expounded this verse to mean: “If you are My witnesses, then I shall be God. But if you are not My witnesses, then, if one could possibly say so, I shall not be God.”<sup>9</sup> To be particularists for the sake of universalism, to espouse a universalism which does not obviate the continued existence of particularism — such has been the family tradition of the “seed of Isaac.”

Jews have been “children of Abraham,” that is, members of the universal community of the believers in the One God; and they have been the “seed of Isaac,” that is, members of one particular human family, the Jewish people.

“Congregation of Jacob.” Neither universal belief nor particular family attachment alone can be said to have made the Jews what they are. A third factor enters the definition; and this factor is alluded to in the description, “congregation of Jacob.”

What is called “congregation of Jacob” is more frequently referred to

8. B. *Shebhu'oth* 39a.

9. *Sifré*, Deuteronomy 33:5, ed. Finkelstein, pp. 403f.

in Scripture as the “congregation of the children of Israel.”<sup>10</sup> It is a body with its own constitution — a constitution which Tradition ascribes to the days of Moses, and which even radical critics do not date any later than the beginning of the Second Jewish Commonwealth. It is in connection with the founding of the Second Jewish Commonwealth that the Bible speaks of a kind of national assembly of the people which adopted the “Law of Moses” as its constitution. Of importance here is Nehemiah 10:33, *wehe’emadnu ’alenu mizwoth*, “We also undertook obligations.” Note that, unlike the biblical narratives which tell of the Sinaitic Revelation, the simple prose account in Nehemiah does not refer to any thunders and lightnings, any volcanic mountains or other earth-shaking phenomena. All we are told is that, in response to the particular situation facing them, and wishing to live in obedience to God’s will, the people and their religious leaders bound themselves to the acceptance of obligations, of *mizwoth*.

*Mizwah* is an important word in Judaism. It means divine command, obligation and good deed. Much later, Jewish legalists would enumerate a total of 613 *mizwoth*, of which 248 were positive commandments, and 365 were prohibitions. *Mizwoth* comprise definite moral imperatives, a regimen of self-discipline, the poetry of daily living, the commemoration of events in a common history, and a distinctive style of living, both moral and ritual, by which the members of “the congregation of the children of Israel” were able to recognize one another as brethren, and by which others, outsiders, were able to recognize the members of “the congregation of the children of Israel” as such.

Yet the *mizwoth* were not to remain static. Although the Priestly Code might have envisaged the priesthood as possessed of a monopoly on the administration of the Law, lay scholars in later generations successfully challenged the priestly monopoly. Learning, and not priestly birth, was now to be the sole qualification of those who would administer the Law — administer it, and also *interpret* it. And “interpretation” served as the mechanism of progress and development, of constantly adjusting the *mizwoth* to the ever changing circumstances of life. Thus we get from biblical religion to Pharisaic and then to Rabbinic Judaism; and, while the Priestly Code, indeed, the whole Pentateuch, was ever regarded as the divinely ordained constitution, its provisions could constantly be interpreted and re-interpreted by the duly qualified rabbis, preventing Judaism from ever becoming wedded to a narrow and literalist Scriptural Fundamentalism.

What the Priestly Code calls the *’adath bené yisrael*, “the congregation of the children of Israel,” the prayer which we have repeatedly quoted calls *’adath ya’aqobh*, “the congregation of Jacob.” When, therefore, that prayer refers to the Jews not only as “children of Abraham” and “seed of

10. Cf. Exodus 12:3 and very often in the Pentateuch.

Isaac,” but also as “congregation of Jacob,” it clearly indicates that, in addition to belief and peoplehood, there is also the requirement of a common cult and a common moral and ceremonial practice, in order to make the Jew what he is meant to be. The prayer thus foreshadows what the late Professor Samuel S. Cohon has called “The Four C’s of every fully developed religion”:

- (1) Creed — a body of beliefs, doctrines or principles concerning the holy;
- (2) Code of Conduct — a body of ethical obligations growing out of the sense and the idea of the holy;
- (3) Cult — a body of organized ritual and ceremony in keeping with the notions of the holy; and
- (4) Congregation, i.e., a social bond uniting into one single community or church all those who adhere to the particular beliefs, obligations, and rituals.<sup>11</sup>

But what Cohon breaks up into four components, our prayer deals with under only three headings — perhaps because, in Judaism, the code of ethical conduct and the body of organized ritual and ceremony are parts of the same structure of *mizwoth* which serves as the constitution of the “congregation.”

The threefold cord of “children of Abraham,” “seed of Isaac” and “congregation of Jacob” remained unbroken throughout Jewish history well into the eighteenth century, and, in most places, until the first half of the nineteenth century. It defined Jewish identity, and it governed Jewish living.

If the Jewish faith-community is to be described as a “people,” then its “peoplehood” must be specified as a *religious* peoplehood. When the Prophet Jonah was asked: “Where have you come from? What is your country, and of what people are you?,” he quite naturally coupled the information about his ethnic origin with the information about his religious affiliation. He replied: “I am a Hebrew. I worship the Lord, the God of Heaven, who made both sea and dry land.”<sup>12</sup> In the tenth century of the Common Era, Saadia Gaon, the first systematic theologian of the Jewish Middle Ages, asserted: “Our people is a people only on account of its *toroth*, i.e., its religious teachings and laws.”<sup>13</sup> As late as the very end of the nineteenth century, in 1896, the very founder of secularist political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, wrote in his book, *The Jewish State*: “It is only by the faith of our fathers that we recognize our historic community, for we have long since indelibly absorbed the languages of the various nations.”<sup>14</sup>

But if Jewish “peoplehood” was a *religious* peoplehood, it is also true to say that the Jewish religion was the *people’s* religion. While other reli-

11. Samuel S. Cohon, *What We Jews Believe and A Guide to Jewish Practice* (Assen: Royal Vangorcum Ltd., 1971), p. 16.

12. Jonah 1:8-9.

13. Saadia Gaon, *Sepher Ha-Emunoth wehaDe’oth*, Ch. III, ed. Fischel, p. 80.

14. Theodor Herzl, *Der Judenstaat*. 11th edition (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 1936), p. 63.

gions may ascribe a high degree of sainthood to the hermit who shuns the life of society, and who runs away into deserts and caves to practice his religion in splendid isolation, a person like that could hardly live in accordance with the *Jewish* ideal of saintliness. The moral and ethical *mizwoth* presuppose inter-personal relationships for their implementation, while many of the major liturgical acts of Judaism can be performed only in the presence of a *minyan*, the quorum of ten adults which serves as a surrogate for the Jewish faith-community as a whole. There was, indeed, a time when a monastic ideal animated some Jewish sectarians. They left Jerusalem for the shores of the Dead Sea, and they have bequeathed to us the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls. Yet, one of their important documents was the *Serekh Hayahad*, the "Rule of the Community." When Jews produced hermits who ran away from the community, those hermits inevitably established a *community* of those who ran away from the community! One just could not be a Jew in isolation. Judaism was a "people's religion."

"Children of Abraham," "seed of Isaac" and "congregation of Jacob" — the Jews who have survived throughout history *as Jews* have been people who maintained that threefold cord. There have, of course, been some who, starting out as Jews, and thinking that they could get along without one or the other component, have disappeared. There can, for example, be no doubt that the first Christians were Jews in the fullest sense of the word. In matters of belief, they were "children of Abraham." (Their seeing the expected messiah in Jesus of Nazareth was, from the Jewish point of view, no greater heresy than Rabbi Akiba's putative support of the messianic claims of Bar Kokheba.) By ethnic descent, they were of the "seed of Isaac." In religious practice, they adhered fully to the constitution of the "congregation of Jacob." Later Christians, it is true, developed a theology which found itself at variance with the particular Jewish emphases of monotheistic belief. But long before that theology crystallized, there were tendencies at work in the early Church which called into question the Christians' membership in the family of the "seed of Isaac" and in the "congregation of Jacob." The "family," as we have noted before, was not averse to having outsiders join it. But those outsiders were required to undergo certain admission procedures. The Church changed those procedures. The "congregation of Jacob," as we have seen, lived under a constitution of *mizwoth*. The Church, following the teachings of the Apostle Paul, found in the faith in the messiah who had come a substitute for the performance of *mizwoth*. That is why, quite inevitably, Christianity ceased to be a Jewish sect, and became a different, non-Jewish religion in its own right. And that is why Jews today may still find kinship with Christians as fellow "children of Abraham," but do not share with Christians the family tradition of the "seed of Isaac" or the life of *mizwoth*, common to the "congregation of Jacob."

Similarly, the sect of the Karaites, arising among the Jews in the eighth century of the Common Era, was founded by men who, in the fullest sense of the word, were Jews. Their only difference from the other Jews of their time was that they, the Karaites, rejected the Rabbinic interpretation of the Torah. As the Karaites saw it, God's Word was to be found in the Bible alone, and not in the Talmud. While this was an important theological difference, it did not affect any other elements of the Jewish structure of belief. Like the rest of the Jews, the Karaites were strict monotheists; they believed in Revelation and in the coming of the messiah. They contributed greatly to the grammatical study of the Hebrew language, and they were passionate Lovers of Zion. Yet their rejection of the Rabbinic tradition also meant that, in the course of time, there evolved among the Karaites a law of marriage and divorce which differed from the procedures of the rest of Jewry. The ultimate result was that Karaite Jews could no longer intermarry with other Jews. That, of course, affected their status as *bona fide* members of the family of the "seed of Isaac." Moreover, by rejecting the Rabbinic interpretation of the Torah, the Karaites also rejected the calendar of Rabbinic Judaism. They continued to observe all the biblical festivals, but the dates of the festivals celebrated by the Karaites no longer necessarily coincided with the dates of the festivals on which the rest of Jewry celebrated them. And this, in turn, called into question their status as members of the "congregation of Jacob." As a heretical sect, the Karaites have not altogether left Judaism, as Christianity had done, but they have moved to the very periphery of Judaism, have suffered considerable decimation in numbers, and are not normally reckoned as members of the Jewish faith-community today.

Not all innovators in the course of Jewish history have shared the fate of either the Christians or the Karaites. There have been fierce struggles, in the Middle Ages, between Jewish rationalists and Jewish anti-rationalists. There have been equally fierce struggles, in the eighteenth century and since, between the Hasidim and their opponents, the *mithnaggedim*. There have been arguments about the correct interpretation of Bible and Talmud, about the *Zohar* and about liturgical innovations. But, in all of those struggles, the protagonists of either side of the various issues were equally committed to the threefold cord of "children of Abraham," "seed of Isaac" and "congregation of Jacob." That, perhaps, is the reason why, in the past, once an innovative movement had had its say, and once it had made its contribution to the totality of Judaism, its teachings and often its practices were absorbed by the mainstream of Judaism, becoming the possession of all of Israel — there thus being no necessity for the formation of sects which would move to the periphery of Judaism and beyond.

Such has been the situation from the beginning of the Second Jewish

Commonwealth through the millennia; and such has been the self-awareness of the Jew, his understanding of what it was that made him a Jew. No doubt, the isolation in which Jews were generally compelled to live during much of that period has had at least this positive effect: it has helped to maintain the threefold cord.

The situation was to change radically once that isolation disappeared with the coming of the modern era.

## *Cemetery In Missouri*

ALLEN KANFER

Reading the names and dates again  
 As if deciphering the faded  
 Headstones of ancient times  
 I say, "My father:" say, "My mother."  
 No saw, no moral to instruct  
 The visitor. What I remember  
 Suffices to fill up my mind.  
 An old man asks would I have him  
 Chant the prayer, "God full of mercy."  
 The grass about the stones is brown  
 Not even weeds peep through. I ask  
 The old man to pray separate prayers  
 And give him father's and mother's names.  
 His voice spins through the prayers.  
     Mercy is invoked.  
 I press some coins upon him, nod,  
 And turn to read the names and dates,  
 "This is my father, this my mother."

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# *Toward a Theory of Modern Jewish Social Control*

NORMAN B. MIRSKY

THIS ESSAY REFLECTS AN ATTEMPT TO CALL the attention of others to a number of sociological problems which both beg solutions and offer inducements for further research. Since my arrival in 1976 on the Los Angeles campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, I have been offering, each spring semester, a course entitled "Boundaries of Normative Jewish Behavior." The course is meant to determine the parameters of what attitudes and behaviors non-Orthodox Jews will tolerate in fellow Jews — that is: what are the outer limits of tolerance that the non-Orthodox assign to those who wish to be recognized as legitimate members of the Jewish collectivity?

Three determinants of acceptability have been considered. Groups such as gays or the Jewish Defense League periodically make application for inclusion within the Los Angeles Jewish Federation-Council. Membership therein would grant them public recognition and a sort of legitimacy. Despite the fact that homosexuality runs counter to traditional Jewish law, a gay synagogue, Beth Chayim Chadashim, was accepted for membership — and for subsidization. On the other hand, the Jewish Defense League, a Jewish defense organization which claims to be made up of Orthodox Jews and employs para-military tactics, has consistently been denied membership. Thus, membership in the Jewish Federation-Council is clearly one determinant of Jewish communal acceptability.

A second determinant is the attitude which members of "peripheral" groups feel that other Jews, recognized as legitimate, have to them. This information — call it self-perception — has been obtained through interviews with members of the "peripheral" groups. Rather extensive interviewing has been done, but, of course, more is needed.

A third and inevitably less measurable determinant is necessary: the way that rank and file "normal" Jews perceive these groups. While, ultimately, it may be they who decide which groups are legitimate and which are not, methods of getting at the rank and file are imprecise. Even so, attempts have been made in many of the studies listed below to ascertain the point of view of such Jews. It must be pointed out, however, that the very difficulty of ascertaining the opinions of the rank and file Jews whose views are unarticulated makes for a vacuum of knowledge

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about what most Jews regard as legitimate Jewish behavior. This vacuum allows ideological leaders to generate and receive publicity for viewpoints which rank and file Jews may or may not accept. This point will be elaborated further on.

One of the reasons for difficulty in surveying the attitudes of Jews is that, to begin with, a consensus has to be reflected in the definition of who is Jewish. Since the course attempts to discover what is deemed legitimate non-Orthodox Jewish behavior, we are caught in a kind of methodological double bind. In the five years that the course has been offered, only one group has consistently been seen as quite unacceptable when it makes claims to Jewishness — the one variously called Hebrew Christians or Messianic Jews or Jews for Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Needless to say, the theoretical basis for the course is “deviant theory,” particularly as expounded by Durkheim,<sup>2</sup> Howard Becker,<sup>3</sup> Kai Erikson,<sup>4</sup> and Erving Goffman.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps my use of deviant theory in directing the research in the course is best summed up by Erikson’s understanding that

from a sociological standpoint deviance can be defined as conduct which is generally thought to require the attention of social control agencies — that is, conduct about which “something should be done.” Deviance is not a property inherent in certain forms of behavior; it is a property conferred upon these forms by the *audience* which directly or indirectly witnesses them. The critical variable in the study of deviance, then, is the *social audience* rather than the individual actor, since it is the audience which eventually determines whether or not any episode of behavior or any class of episode is labeled deviant.<sup>6</sup>

The major assignment in the course is a seminar paper based on field research. (In a number of instances students have extended their research in fulfillment of a thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Jewish Communal Service.) Among the topics researched have been the Jewish Defense League,<sup>7</sup> converts to Judaism as individuals<sup>8</sup> and in groups,<sup>9</sup> the previously married (the divorced<sup>10</sup> and the widowed<sup>11</sup>),

1. See “The Jesus Hang-up,” in N.B. Mirsky, *Unorthodox Judaism* (Columbus, 1978).

2. Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (N.Y., 1958).

3. Howard Becker, *Outsiders* (N.Y., 1963).

4. Kai T. Erikson, “Notes on the Sociology of Deviance,” in Howard Baker, ed., *The Other Side* (N.Y., 1964).

5. Erving Goffman, *Stigma* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963).

6. Erikson, pp. 10-11 (my emphasis).

7. Mark Sobel, “The Jewish Defense League” (Unpublished Seminararbeit, Hebrew Union College, L.A., 1977); Gary Goodman, “Rabbi Meir Kahane: Rhetoric and Response” (Unpublished Seminararbeit, Hebrew Union College, L.A., 1978).

8. Lydia Kukoff, “And the Stranger Who Dwells Among You” (Unpublished Seminararbeit, Hebrew Union College, L.A., 1978).

9. Shane Birns, “The Psychiatrist’s Converts” (Unpublished Seminararbeit, Hebrew Union College, L.A., 1979).

10. Mona Panitz and Janis Plotkin, “Divorced Jewish Mothers” (MAJCS/MSW thesis, Hebrew Union College/University of Southern California, 1976).

11. Janis Ballin, “An Intergenerational Torah Ceremony” (Unpublished Seminararbeit, Hebrew Union College, L.A., 1978).

Christian missionaries and the Jewish elderly in board and care homes,<sup>12</sup> the Jewish slow learner,<sup>13</sup> and Jewish lesbians.<sup>14</sup> Such research, while yielding no startling revelations about the “normal” Jewish community, has yielded information which certainly suggests the advisability of further and much more sophisticated research into the application of a form of social control which may be especially strong among Jews. This form of social control might be called “unlabelling.” When “normal” Jews do not approve of groups or of the behavior of people in groups which call themselves Jewish, a rather typical response of the “normals” is to deny the disapproved an equal right to the adjective “Jewish.” Now, from an historical perspective, it is understandable that Jesus Jews should not be conceded the right to call themselves Jewish; after all, the debate as to who is the true Israel goes back to the Church Fathers. One must ask oneself, however, what it is about the Jewish Defense League’s disruption of a meeting or the fact that an after-service social at a particular synagogue is reputedly where “sexual affairs” have begun, that gives rise to the unlabelling process. Once a group or an activity has been successfully unlabelled, so much energy is expended by that group or institution in an effort to regain the “Jewish tag” that this dissonance reduction becomes a major activity.<sup>15</sup> In addition to forcing the unlabelled into a defensive posture and possibly limiting the growth of such groups as the Hebrew Christians or the Jewish Defense League, a rather significant consequence of unlabelling is that people who had been taught to think of themselves as fully legitimate Jews (converts, for example, or the previously married) have been shown, in our research, to become increasingly hesitant to re-enter synagogues or to participate in Federation-sponsored events.

Such information may prove valuable to Jewish institutions looking to augment their memberships by appealing to an ever-increasing population of converts and singles. Other data emerging from the research indicate that another type of social control — again using unlabelling — is employed by “normal” Jews and, from the point of view of the unlabelled, it produces effects not only sociologically significant but, indeed, involving serious psychological consequences.

A number of students in my “Boundaries” course studied individuals who were the victims of socially discrediting phenomena (for example,

12. Miriam Prum, “Three Case Studies of Successful Christian Activity” (Unpublished Seminararbeit, Hebrew Union College, L.A., 1978).

13. Allan Henkin, “The ‘Shoteh’ and the Jewish Community” (Unpublished Seminararbeit, Hebrew Union College, L.A., 1977).

14. Sandra Rubenstein and Carol Matthews, “Lesbian Jews: Reconciling a Dual Identity” (MAJCS/MSW thesis, Hebrew Union College/University of Southern California, 1981).

15. The recent rise of militant ultra-Orthodox Jewish activity in Israel and the United States has put “modern Orthodox,” Conservative Jewish institutions, and even Reform Jews on the defensive. Dissonance reduction takes up much time. See, for example, *Sh'ma* (October 19, 1979).

alcoholism,<sup>16</sup> child abuse,<sup>17</sup> and wife battering<sup>18</sup>). In nearly every instance where any of the above categories of individuals were located (and locating them was *not* difficult), they tended to have this view of themselves: "My disability is not one that Jews have and, therefore, there must be something about *me* that is not Jewish. Furthermore, I must keep my being a victim secret from other Jews." One result of such internalization of a particular *shandeh* (shame-producing behavior) by a Jew is that, while many Jews may share it, (statistical frequency is not meant here — raw numbers are), few Jewish alcoholics, few Jewish husband-battered, few Jewish parent-abused are aware of the existence of fellow Jews who are victims of a like phenomenon. As a result of such privatization by the stigmatized, and in response to a feeling that the stigma is "not something that Jews have," the stigmatized individual is deprived of a potential Jewish support group and, in fact, often seeks help well beyond the visible range of the Jewish community. Of great sociological significance is the circumstance that the Jewish "audience" (*vide* Erikson) is deprived of an awareness of categories of socially stigmatized individuals within its midst, some of whom members of the Jewish audience would perhaps wish to help and to reintegrate into the Jewish community.

It might be contended (in fact, it is my suspicion, which I hope will prove heuristic) that those who seek to present the American Jewish community to the "world" — that is, to "make a case" for being Jewish in America — have a need to argue convincingly that being Jewish in America guarantees those choosing to remain Jewish in a voluntary society a high statistical probability of a life of middle class stability, one in which children are likely to be achievers and families are unlikely to be ravaged by alcoholism or physical abuse and what is felt to be closely linked to such stigmata, lower class status.

Here, briefly, is my line of reasoning. For well known social and historical reasons, not the least of them anti-Semitism, it has not always been seen as advantageous by Jews to remain Jewish. Nevertheless, there were two overriding reasons that Jews had for remaining Jews. One was religious. Most Jews believed that salvation, their portion of the world-to-come, was contingent upon their fidelity to Judaism in this one.<sup>19</sup> A decision to leave the Jewish fold, unless one sincerely believed in the efficacy of conversion to another faith, meant the loss of one's portion in

16. Marcia C. Spiegel, "The Heritage of Noah: Alcoholism in the Jewish Community Today" (MAJCS thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1979).

17. Betsy Jeanne Giller and Ellen Rachel Goldsmith, "All in the Family: Intra-familial Violence in the Los Angeles Jewish Family" (MAJCS/MSW thesis, Hebrew Union College/University of Southern California, 1980).

18. Mimi Scarf, "Battered Jewish Women: A Descriptive Study" (MAJCS thesis, Hebrew Union College, 1980).

19. For a statement of the salvatory belief in traditional Judaism, see Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (N.Y., 1934). See also Ellis Rivkin, *The Shaping of Jewish History* (N.Y., 1971), p. 85.

the world-to-come. The second overriding reason for remaining Jewish was the total communal support that one received for remaining in the *kehillah* (the Jewish community, which has sacred and secular connections) and the inability of an individual to leave it without forfeiting communal support as well as one's identity and family reputation.<sup>20</sup>

With the coming of the emancipation — that is, the ability of the Jew to enter the larger society as an individual citizen rather than as a member of the Jewish collectivity — along with a breakdown of traditional belief in otherworldly salvation, — remaining Jewish has become a private option. Hence, a need arises, among those who wish to see the Jewish community retain adherents, to be able to “make a case,” to argue convincingly that it is to an individual's advantage to stay Jewish. Added to this is a belief that the more completely Jews can come close to emulating the values and behaviors of the upper strata of the larger society, the better are the chances of individual Jews and the Jewish community as a whole to avoid anti-Semitism, and the better are their chances to achieve economic advancement.<sup>21</sup>

Once the Jewish community became voluntary, not only did a case have to be made for remaining Jewish, but some persuasive means of social control had to be devised to enable the community to keep its implicit promise that remaining within it would serve the interests of the individual as well as of the group. This it did by fostering the notion that, were one to commit oneself to staying within the Jewish community, one would be better off than the *goyim*. By *goyim* were meant people whose behavior was unintellectual, prone to violence and alcoholism, given to criminality and to other traits that one associated with the lower classes.

From the widespread notion that the Jewish community is successful in middle-class terms have come some of the consequences, anticipated or otherwise, which emerged in the studies done for the “Boundaries” class. I refer here to the suppositions of individual Jews who were unable to measure up to the image presented the Jewish community by itself, their supposition that they did not fit into the community, their supposition of failure to achieve Jewish legitimacy. This led to Jews who did not measure up receding from view — which led, in turn, to the illusion that the Jewish community was minus deviants.

Finally, there have been some further developments: the emergence of a new type of Jewish leader for whom I would use the Goffmanesque term “moral entrepreneur,” the reaching of the Jewish audience by the teaching of the moral entrepreneur, the internalized stigmatization of individuals who cannot measure up to the moral entrepreneur's picture of the “good Jew” and, ultimately, the privatization of the individual's stigma, leading, in effect, to a sort of self-excommunication. The end result of the process is a self-fulfilling prophecy of a Jewish community

20. For a full discussion of this topic, see Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis* (N.Y., 1961).

21. See John Murray Cuddihy, *The Ordeal of Civility* (N.Y., 1974), pp. 3-14.

made up of successes — and the disappearance or invisibility of anyone who might give the lie to the prophecy.

*The Role of the Moral Entrepreneur*

As the Jewish community has lost its coherent structure and has come increasingly to be made up of variegated audiences, and as individual Jews typically learn of their collective past through books about Jewish history, sociology, religion, and politics rather than through the refracted experience of grandparents and others who have been Jewish in another time and place, so it has become possible for the collective Jewish experience to be re-written. A rather extensive redaction of the past has been produced, ranging from *Fiddler on the Roof* to a book written by one of that musical's most outspoken critics, *World of Our Fathers*, by Irving Howe. The range of scholarship is noteworthy, too — from Max Dimont's rather fanciful *Jews, God, and History* to the more academic writings of such excellent scholars as Marshall Sklare and Daniel Elazar. But all of these works, regardless of their variations in quality and depth, have one element in common. They restate the Jewish past in such a way as to make Jews on the contemporary scene seem less Jewish than those who preceded them.<sup>22</sup>

*The Reaching of Jewish Audiences by the Moral Entrepreneur*

Obviously, there are Jews who do not need to be coerced or persuaded to participate in Jewish communal activities. These are the volunteers, the synagogue presidents, the board members, the Federation-Council lay people, who constitute an immediate audience for the work of the moral entrepreneur. And, of course, they are joined by Jewish professionals — rabbis, communal workers, fund raisers, executives of Jewish agencies, those whose lives are dependent emotionally and financially on maintaining contact with their audiences who will remain “consumers” of what they have to offer, “consumers” of institutional affiliation, of a safe Israel, of whatever “products” the Jewish professionals have to sell. These professionals have great need for the ideological products of the moral entrepreneur.<sup>23</sup>

Jewish communal leaders, both lay and professional, constitute a numerical minority of America's Jews. I think it safe to assume, however, that they serve as opinion leaders for millions of American Jews who may themselves be no more than peripheral to the formal American Jewish

22. Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (N.Y., 1976); Max Dimont, *Jews, God and History* (N.Y., 1962); Dennis Prager and Joseph Telushkin, *Eight Questions People ask about Judaism* (White-stone, N.Y., 1975); Daniel Elazar, *Community and Polity* (Philadelphia, 1976); and Marshall Sklare, *America's Jews* (N.Y., 1971).

23. An illustration of Jewish ideological writing at its best is found in Appendix A of Elazar's *Community and Polity*: “The American Jewish Community's Response to the Yom Kippur War: A Case Study in Organizational Dynamics,” pp. 341-77.

communal structure, but live in connection with Jews within that structure and thereby comprise an American Jewish audience.

*The Process of Social Control: The Ideology of the Moral Entrepreneur Reaches the Jewish Family*

The data provided by our research do nothing to dissuade us from the generally accepted notion that the nuclear family is the primary socializing agency of deviants as well as of "normal" individuals. The middle-class Jewish family seems to be a repository for America's middle-class values, what has commonly been called the Protestant ethic, plus an additional value overlay, a picture of an ideal Jew who, from the ancient past to the moment at hand, has been hard-working, a good family person, eschewing aggression and physical violence in civilian life. This overlay would have it that sobriety, economic achievement, intellectual vigor, the making of a good match with another Jew, and philanthropy have been the legacy of all Jews. One need only read Jewish history, listen to sermons, or consult the literature published by Jewish defense agencies, to know that these are the attributes which make a person Jewish. Thus, the moral entrepreneur reaches those who voluntarily commit themselves to activities within the Jewish community's organizational network. These people — generally perceived to be successful and generally seen from afar, in the local Jewish press and the bulletins of synagogues and of other organizations, and sometimes in the media at large — become the significant others, the role models held up to the Jewish child as examples of what being Jewish means. At the same time, of course, a negative image, a negative ego ideal, is presented, "a sub-structure of the super ego." It is described as comprising principally the internalized negative standards of the parents and the culture. When one behaves or feels in such a way as to approximate the despised standards of the negative ego ideal, what characteristically results is shame, some times of such intensity that humiliation and mortification are experienced. Though often enough personified by a specific individual, the negative ego ideal is actually an aggregate of behavioral concepts which are the opposite of those of the positive ego ideal. Each family constructs its own negative ego ideals for the child — financial failure, for instance. Thus, even success in education or artistic endeavor may not save one from being counted as a failure by family connections in a way that an outsider may find incomprehensible. The negative ego ideal is typified by someone whose deficiency or inadequacy in behavior or feeling excites contempt or ridicule and leads to abandonment by family and friends.<sup>24</sup>

From what I have argued above it will be clear, I think, how the Jewish community is able to continue exerting powerful control over an indi-

24. Roy M. Whitman and Stanley M. Kaplan, "Clinical, Cultural and Literary Elaborations of Negative Ego-Ideal," in Paul H. Ornstein and Charles Hofling, eds., *Memos to Maury* (Cincinnati, 1968).



vidual's self-perception. Individuals may, indeed, be made to feel themselves so remote from the positive ego ideal that they have no choice but to avoid association with other members of the Jewish audience. The outcome is isolation from family and friends and from possible sources of support from within the Jewish community. It is evident that certain behaviors formerly exhibited only by negative ego ideals — I am thinking of exogamy and certain sexual styles — have become so widespread in the non-Orthodox Jewish audience that they no longer produce inner feelings of shame or win communal condemnation. Nevertheless, our research indicates that the self-perception of Jews who are victims of substance abuse and intra-family violence still inclines them to see themselves as unJewish. In effect, they unlabel themselves.

Thus, it might be argued that, although modern Jews have moved from the *kehillah* to a voluntary alignment in audiences, the conditions of modernity have, to some degree, been productive of new phenomena which tend to strengthen rather than weaken Jewish social control, and enable those who seek a more structured Jewish community to amass more power than an earlier generation of social scientists would have thought possible.

This is how I account for it: In America, identity — the ability to locate one's self in the world — is a precious commodity. Far from being disadvantageous to an individual, the attribute of Jewishness adds a cosmic dimension to one's identity and, hence, is not an attribute that one would want taken away. Jewishness, however, is not a term of fixed meaning. While it has had, and still retains, certain historic meanings and while Jews as a people certainly share a common history and experience and a gene pool, too, what constitutes a set of authentic Jewish behavior patterns outside of a purely halakhic system is moot. The combination of a need for Jewish identity, the absence of connection with previous generations of Jews who might have explicated what Jewish behavior was like in the not too distant past, and the presence of those who, for various reasons, are willing to provide contemporary Jews with clear negative ego ideals, promotes among Jewish audiences forms of social control which may have been heretofore undiscovered or unappreciated.

It is my view that the unlabelling of Jews, forcing Jews to view whatever social stigmatization they may suffer as a form of secular excommunication, is particularly cruel in a period so wanting in sources of stability. The research results of the "Boundaries" class seem to underscore the existence of this cruelty — this laming of the victim. Apparently, however, there are some who feel that any sign of the existence of social control in the Jewish community is a sign of vitality.

Even so, few can deny the irony: in a traditional pre-modern religiously centered society, community was involuntary, but — apart from instances of rebellion against rabbinic authority — depriving a Jew of his Jewishness was a right which belonged exclusively to God in the world-to-

come.<sup>25</sup> In privatized, individuated, rationalistic modern America, community is voluntary, but the ability to deny a person the right to feel authentically Jewish seems to have become a privilege assumed by Jewish moral entrepreneurs in alliance with modern American Jewish institutions and their need for a certain type of clientele.

In Europe, attributing disreputable behavior to *goyim* had one social meaning. In America, making of a Jew a *goy*, if he or she indulges in behaviors labelled shameful or “assimilationist,” has quite another social meaning. A relatively small group of people, operating in a communal vacuum, have come to possess a tremendous amount of power to deprive Jewish human beings of their Jewish identity and to do so through definition and stigmatization, through the creation and the incorporation of the negative ego ideal. The irony is that members of groups like the Hebrew Christians are virtually immune to Jewish communal shaming, while people whose putative treason to Jewishness lies in being victims of one or another social disease, be it alcohol abuse or battering or the inability to measure up to middle-class standards of success, certainly do not feel welcome as Jews and may ultimately vanish from the Jewish audience.

Now it may well be that some value ideal of Jewish survival is being served as the social controls now employed, whose existence is detectable in our research. Perhaps we don't need Jews who are alcoholics or mate-beaten or intellectually slow. Perhaps bringing the “morally soiled” to common Jewish attention will bring them to common non-Jewish attention as well and will be used against us. It has happened before.<sup>26</sup> If our demographers are right, the Jewish critical mass is shrinking. If our apologists are correct, we are a warm compassionate family, we Jews. Perhaps we can solve the problem that our demographers pose if we take seriously the slogans that our apologists offer. After all, one of the best apologists we ever had — though maybe a laggard where public relations are concerned — was Rabbi Akiba, who reportedly said:

Only a grief that belongs to an individual is a real grief. If no individual is involved, it is no grief at all.<sup>27</sup>

25. For a full discussion of the uses of *herem*-excommunication, see H.H. Ben Sasson, ed., *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), pp. 503-5, 509-11, 542, 607, 626, 686, 690, 719, 772-74; Katz, *Tradition and Crisis*, pp. 16, 79, 117, 129, 177, 249; Bernard Martin, *A History of Judaism* (N.Y., 1974), II, pp. 56, 76, 108, 183, 217, 234, 248, 261.

26. For an example of how calling the existence of a Jewish problem (white slavery) to public notice had severe repercussions, see B. Edinger, “Bertha Pappenheim,” in *Jewish Social Studies*, XX (1958).

27. *Deuteronomy Rabbah*, II:22.

# C.G. Montefiore and his Quest

MAURICE G. BOWLER

*... the relation of Liberal Judaism to the life and teaching of the historic Jesus, as well as to the books of the New Testament. This is one of the most important matters which has yet to be taken in hand.*

C.G. Montefiore, 1908<sup>1</sup>

## *His Background*

CLAUDE G. MONTEFIORE (1858-1938), THE founder of British Liberal Judaism, came from a very distinguished Anglo-Jewish family, the most famous member of which was Sir Moses Montefiore (1784-1885), the renowned Victorian philanthropist. If he had chosen to do so, Claude Montefiore could have become a respected leader in mainstream Anglo-Jewry. His credentials were impeccable as, after private tuition, he had gone to Balliol College, Oxford, where he had studied under Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893), and, after study in Berlin with Solomon Schechter, he returned to a gentleman's life to follow his interests without having to follow a profession.

## *His Role*

Montefiore's declared purpose was to ensure the survival of Judaism. In *The Jewish Religious Union and its Cause* he says, "Our cause is, as we believe, the cause of Judaism."<sup>2</sup> Because he rejected the Zionist solution (of isolation *from* the Western world) and also the voluntary ghetto solution (of isolation *within* the Western world) he felt that Judaism had to be reconstituted if it was to meet the challenge of assimilation which, if uncontrolled, could lead to Anglo-Jewry's disappearance. By definition, the nature of the problem of assimilation and its solution must relate to the cultural force to which the Jewish community was seen to be integrating itself. In Montefiore's day this was a powerful Christianity which, in his youth, strongly influenced the two main universities in England, Oxford and Cambridge, which, in turn, tended to dominate the life of the

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1. *Papers for Jewish People IV* (London: Jewish Religious Union, 1908), p. 12. [These Papers are a series of tracts put out by the Jewish Religious Union for the Advancement of Liberal Judaism.]

2. *The Jewish Religious Union and Its Cause* (London: Jewish Religious Union, 1908), p. 11.

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nation. He said of the Jews of Britain and America "five-sixths of their conception of life is Christian."<sup>3</sup> This statement closely parallels that of Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), who faced a similar challenge in Germany, of which he said, "We are Christians in everything . . . our whole culture rests entirely on a Christian foundation."<sup>4</sup>

Like Rosenzweig, Montefiore saw this as a challenge which could be met by absorbing the best of the surrounding culture and mobilizing what was absorbed in the service of Judaism. Rosenzweig said, "In being Jews we must not give up anything, not renounce anything, but lead everything back to Judaism."<sup>5</sup> Montefiore similarly felt that there was much in Christian teaching to enrich Judaism, like the "compulsion of love" taught in such parables as "The Good Samaritan," "The Prodigal Son" and "The Search for the Lost Sheep."<sup>6</sup> But whereas Rosenzweig opted for a "Two Covenant" system which "contained" Gentile Christians within a special Christian covenant with God, based on John 14:6, and would leave the Jewish people free to enjoy their own special covenant relationship with God,<sup>7</sup> Montefiore went beyond this "parallel lines" concept.

Perhaps because he had never contemplated Christian baptism, as Rosenzweig had done, Montefiore was much more bold and daring in his treatment of Christianity and its leading characters and in this he is perhaps unique in this century. Because of the very high standing which he gained as a scholar, in Christian circles and, to a lesser degree, in his own Jewish circles, he was well placed to take a "Synoptic" view of Judaism and Christianity. He aptly illustrates the saying, "A genius sees what everybody else can see and thinks what nobody else has thought." It was obvious to all that the external Emancipation and the internal Enlightenment had loosened many of the traditional bonds which had held European Jewry together. Similarly, Liberal Protestantism had loosened a great deal of Christian rigidity and much, even most, of Christian doctrine in Liberal circles was in a state of flux, especially since the increasing impact of higher critical studies had undermined the confidence of many Protestants regarding the Divine Inspiration and infallibility of the Bible, their main authority for doctrine.

As Montefiore saw the need for Liberal Jews to understand Christianity, he applied himself to both Christian and Jewish sources, enlisting the aid of distinguished scholars and making himself master of the most advanced of Christian and Jewish scholarship. He wrote to his relative, Lucy Cohen, "I am the only English Jew living who can approach the

3. *Papers for Jewish People XVI*, 1917, p. 22.

4. Nahum Glatzer, *Franz Rosenzweig – His Life and Thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 9.

5. Franz Rosenzweig, "On Jewish Learning," in *Contemporary Jewish Thought*, ed. Simon Noveck (Washington, D.C.: B'nai B'rith, 1969), pp. 223–4.

6. *Papers for Jewish People XVI*, 1917, p. 23. See also, Claude G. Montefiore, *Liberal Judaism and Hellenism* (London: Macmillan, 1918), pp. 86–7.

7. Glatzer, *Op. cit.* p. 341.

gospels fairly impartially.”<sup>8</sup> This claim, coming from an excessively modest man, has to be given considerable weight. As with Rosenzweig, his protracted studies in Christianity and apparent sympathy with Christian ideas were interpreted as a retreat from Judaism into something very like Christianity. This in spite of firm and clear rejection of the basic Christian doctrines by both men.

### *His Vision*

Montefiore certainly did a great deal to interpret Judaism to Christians, with lasting positive effect on Christian thought. His equally vigorous attempt to interpret Christianity to Jews was dogged with misunderstandings because it was so much out of line with Jewish thought. There was a long history of polemical writing on both the Christian and Jewish sides and a classic anti-Christian book, *The Faith Strengthened*, by Isaac of Troki, was translated and distributed in the Jewish community only seven years before Montefiore's birth by Moses Mocatta. Both Jews and Christians were used to a disputational role in the past, although many of Montefiore's Christian readers, where they were not actually engaged in seeking to win over Jews to Christianity, seemed to be already tired of being adversaries. Christians were helped by Montefiore's books such as *The Religious Teaching of Jesus* (1910) and *Judaism and St. Paul* (1914) and Jews by such books as *Liberal Judaism* (1903) and *Outlines of Liberal Judaism* (1923) and many other books and pamphlets and articles. Montefiore's work was welcomed by Christians but the Jewish establishment and those for whom they spoke tended to view with suspicion any “irenical” treatment of Christianity.

The disciple of his later years, Rabbi Dr. Leslie Edgar, tells of Montefiore saying that “many Jewish friends had said to him, ‘You know, Montefiore, I would join your movement if you would give up your preoccupation with Jesus and the Gospels.’” Rabbi Edgar continues, “I can still hear the ring of Montefiore's voice as he said: ‘Of course I wouldn't.’” But Montefiore was more than an interpreter. His vision of Judaism and Christianity led him to see both religions in a new light with remarkable possibilities.

### *His View of Christianity*

Montefiore's views on Christianity were based on insights that he had gained from such outstanding authorities as Benjamin Jowett at Oxford and, in his later studies, in the works of Harnack, Renan, Loisy and others in the forefront of Liberal Christian scholarship in his day. He also was

8. Lucy Cohen, *Some Recollections of C.G. Montefiore* (London: Faber and Faber, 1940), p. 77.

9. L.I. Edgar, *Claude Montefiore's Thought and the Present Religious Situation* (London: The Liberal Jewish Synagogue, 1966), p. 77.

helped by such Jewish scholars as Israel Abrahams and Solomon Schechter. Guided by Jowett's dictum that the student should "put himself above the documents,"<sup>10</sup> Montefiore would tend to see Christianity as the flexible, plastic entity which it had become in the hands of Liberal Christian scholars. In his eminently fair way he conceded that a religion is a whole, "separable" only in the study of the scholar.<sup>11</sup> But this ideal view did not prevent him from carrying out this very separation in his treatment of Christianity, gladly acknowledging the sublimity of the statement of Jesus, "Nothing outside a man, entering into him, can make him unclean"<sup>12</sup> and disapproving strongly of the condemnation by Jesus of Pharisees and Rabbis.<sup>13</sup>

The critical facility of being "above the documents" left the scholar free to select what were felt to be authentic or acceptable statements of Jesus and to withhold recognition from those that were felt to be unworthy sentiments. The key to this treatment was the rejection of the doctrine of divine inspiration of scripture by Liberal Christian scholars. This was like switching off the current in a live electrical system, leaving the operator free to disconnect and remove components at will. Also, by removing any suggestion of intrinsic divine authority from Jesus and the New Testament scriptures, they made it possible for non-Christian scholars such as Montefiore, who shared their basic pre-suppositions, to make use of the New Testament without incurring a charge of compromise. It was then possible to make the expression "divinely inspired" (lit. "God-Breathed" as in 2 Tim. 3:16) an editorial seal of approval rather than an *a priori* characteristic of holy writ. "The disciplined conscience and trained reason"<sup>14</sup> of the reader would recognize in selected writings an affinity with what he already knew of God's nature. On these premises, Montefiore, as a Jew, had more right of access to the Jewish writings of the New Testament than Gentile Liberal Christians who had reclassified the Christian scriptures as part of the general deposit of human literature.

As we have seen, many of Montefiore's Jewish contemporaries did not share this freedom towards Christian things, preferring to define Christianity according to its own internally formulated definitions with their high view of Christ and the New Testament, both equally unacceptable to traditional Judaism. For them, the "current was still switched on" and the system was, consequently, dangerous and to be avoided. Montefiore could say to his fellow Jews, "Christianity was once the great

10. *Papers for Jewish People* XV, 1917, p. 1. See also, B. Jowett, *Dialogues of Plato*, 3rd ed., Vol. III, p. xxxvii, "... the consideration of their morality comes first, afterwards the truth of the documents in which they are recorded ... [W]e only learn the true lesson which is to be gathered from them when we place ourselves above them."

11. *Papers for Jewish People*, XII, 1916, p. 5.

12. Claude G. Montefiore, *The Religious Teaching of Jesus* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 48-9.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

14. *Papers for Jewish People*, X, 1915, p. 18.

*Antithesis* or antagonist . . . not so today”<sup>15</sup> and, continuing the Hegelian process of Thesis versus Antithesis leading to Synthesis, he could go on to say that “merging” may come later.<sup>16</sup> His radical view of Christianity, combined with his equally radical view of Judaism, could take *him* on to such thoughts but he left most of his fellow Jews a long way behind him.

### *On Judaism*

No dogmatic acceptance of the classic formulations of Judaism, such as the Thirteen Principles of Maimonides (1135–1204) or its programmatic equivalent, the *Shulhan Arukh* of Joseph Caro (1488–1575) or even the Torah, both written and oral, “given to Moses on Mount Sinai,” inhibited Montefiore’s development of thought. The critical axiom which seems to have transformed his attitude to Judaism and, through him, the attitude of the whole British Liberal Jewish movement, was that which stated that the Prophetic vision was prior to the Law, in time as well as in status. Montefiore had good authority in contemporary Biblical scholarship for this view, even if he was prepared to use this principle of priority in a more radical way than his friends and associates. Herbert Loewe (1882–1940), his collaborator in *A Rabbinic Anthology* (1938), says, “In one sense, Amos, Hosea and Isaiah precede the Law; in another sense the Law precedes them. If we are concerned with redaction, no doubt priority belongs to these prophets.”<sup>19</sup> Loewe himself held this conviction about temporal precedence to be in full harmony with his position as an orthodox Jew.

Montefiore, however, proceeding from the same premises, pushed on to the more radical Liberal position which made prophetic “Ethical Monotheism” the datum line of normative Judaism, with “Mosaic” Law and Rabbinic Law taking honoured but lower places in the development. This subordination of the letter to the spirit, giving the Law second place in time and significance, is reminiscent of St. Paul’s description of the Law as something temporary, coming in after the promises to Abraham and being superseded by the New Covenant.<sup>20</sup> In Paul’s case, the *promises to Abraham* outshine the Law but, in both cases, the principle of *subordination* of the Law is diametrically opposed to Maimonides, for instance, who says

I believe . . . the prophecy of Moses . . . was true, and that he was the chief of the prophets, both of those that preceded and of those that followed him. I believe . . . the whole law, now in our possession, is the same that was given to Moses. . . .<sup>21</sup>

15. *Papers for Jewish People*, XII, 1916, p. 8.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

17. *Papers for Jewish People*, IV, 1908, p. 7.

18. *Papers for Jewish People*, VI, 1910, p. 12, ff.

19. Montefiore and Loewe, *Rabbinic Anthology* (Greenwich: Meridian, 1938) reprint undated, p. 1xviii.

20. *Romans* 4:13.

21. S. Singer, *The Authorised Daily Prayerbook* (1957), p. 90. What is cited here is from the Thirteen Principles of faith formulated by Maimonides.



Montefiore, on the other hand, states:

We recognize no binding outside authority between us and God, whether in a man or in a book, whether in a church or in a code, whether in a tradition or in a ritual.<sup>22</sup>

He thus committed himself to a prophecy-oriented position in contrast to the Law-oriented position maintained by Jewish orthodoxy. Montefiore did not *reject* Law, just as his critics did not reject Prophecy, but the divergent attributions of priority, in every sense, polarised the Liberal and Orthodox positions.

It would be misleading, of course, to class Montefiore with antinomian and iconoclastic critics of the Law and it would be unfair to see him as an advocate of mere “convenience” or “easy” Judaism. Montefiore could speak eloquently on the merits of the Law and its rabbinical exponents and the delight that they took in fulfilling the Law, and he was especially careful to make these emphases when expounding or defending Judaism before a Gentile audience or readership. Also, in spite of his abhorrence of nationalism and particularism in religion, he rejected the substitution of Sunday worship for Saturday worship, rejected intermarriage with non-Jews (other than proselytes), rejected the use of the New Testament in Jewish worship and insisted on the retention of circumcision — all in the interests of continuity and the avoiding of offense to the wider Jewish community.<sup>23</sup>

### *Conclusion*

As we have seen above, significant segments of both Christianity and Judaism for a time, during Montefiore's earlier career, gave the impression of becoming more flexible towards each other in a world which itself seemed to be moving towards better things. The “irresistible force” of Christianity was much less so and the “immovable object” of Judaism seemed to be much less fixed than before (in both Liberal and Reform circles), but the passage of time seems to have shown these developments to be more cyclic than permanent. Because of this, Montefiore's self-chosen role as a catalyst between the two emerging progressive forces, Liberal Judaism and Liberal Christianity, was never fully realised, although he achieved a great deal.

In our own day, Western Jewry, after observing a long decline in institutional Christianity, is now witnessing the re-emergence of “evangelical” or “conservative” Christianity as a major force in the Western world. In Britain there is a reaction against permissiveness which is affecting

22. Claude G. Montefiore, *The Jewish Religious Union, Its Principles and Its Future* (Private printing, 1909). Cf. *Papers for Jewish People*, XXVII, 1927, p. 21. Lily Montagu says in this tract that the original of *JRU Its Principles and Its Future*, although anonymous in 1909, was written by Claude Montefiore. It was then revised in 1918.

23. *The Jewish Religious Union*, p. 18.

both religion and politics. Particularly among students there is renewed interest in evangelical religion. At St. Aldate's church in Oxford, the rector, Canon Michael Green, is pleading for help to enlarge the already large premises to accommodate the hundreds of students flocking to the services. In Poland, an unusually conservative Pope is welcomed by millions and an atheistic government is shaken by a popular uprising soon afterwards. In the United States, scores of millions of "born-again" Christians are proving a powerful force in the home-country of the world's largest Jewish community. Inevitably, the challenge faced by Montefiore will have to be faced again and his response, however dated it may seem, will have to be brought out again for consideration. Certainly there are few Jewish thinkers living today who can speak with greater authority, knowledge and insight into the relationship between Jews and their Christian neighbours than Claude Montefiore.

# Orthodoxy Resurgent

DAVID J. SCHNALL

## I

THE EUROPEAN JEW WHO CAME TO THESE shores at the turn of the century arrived with high expectations. Gold would lie in the streets, he believed, and diamonds hang from every branch. No more the poverty of the *shtetl*, the oppressive political system preventing mobility from without or the often equally harsh social system preventing mobility from within. This was a new world with open values.

The perspective was reinforced by every cousin, uncle or brother-in-law who had made the journey first. No matter that they had met with little of the expected success. No matter that their living conditions were little improved over what they had left behind. No matter that they even lacked the small bit of status, the great bit of security that the *shtetl* had afforded. They certainly were not about to admit that to their greenhorn relatives who would only chorus: "I told you so!" After all, appearances are also important.

And the new arrival was equally prepared to accommodate himself to his adopted environment. A new world required a new name, new clothes, a new language and, most of all, a new outlook. The old ways, the old observances, perhaps they were functional in Europe. In any event, there was little choice back there. But not here . . . not in America. Here one had to be a *Yenkey*. The beard, the long black coat, the *zizit*, they all must go. Working on the Sabbath was often not even a matter of choice. And how better to insure the successful assimilation of one's children into the new culture than to see that their rearing, their education was inundated with the new American values?

In most ways, the Jewish immigrant was little different from those of other persuasions. This country is largely a secular and pragmatic affair, still much imbued with the great melting pot ideology. Strict religious observance, imported from the old country, is an obstacle at best. At worst, it is suspect.

In response, American Jewish theology, and the institutions created in its support, sought means by which to recognize — even legitimate — these secularist and assimilationist impulses within the context of the faith. For a previous generation of immigrants, the tenets of Reform appeared most appropriate. Relatively unsuccessful in Central Europe during the early and mid-19th century, Reform found fertile ground

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among early American Jewish communities. Notably, German-Jewish immigrants saw this theology as a reasonable compromise with their new environment and their steady economic and social rise after the Civil War.

Aspirations and observances met — both structurally and intellectually. Temples were built on the order of high-church, with separate pews eliminated and organ recitals introduced. Those beliefs and practices that appeared to prevent one's involvement in secular society were dropped officially — even as they had already long been dropped from usage by the congregants. It is no surprise, therefore, that early calls to a nationalist revival and Zionist activism were largely rebuffed by those who saw them as a threat to new-found status and upward mobility. Even the word “Jew” was considered in poor taste and replaced with the softer, more classical “Hebrew.”

But these newer arrivals from Eastern Europe, always more pious and less socially aware, were not quite prepared to go that far . . . at least not initially. Probably less from theological commitment and more from unease, they would not attend the grand services at Reform temples, nor could they afford the social amenities that such society required. They were, after all, poor cousins. They would be cared for by their wealthier co-religionists if only they'd stay downtown, quiet and deferentially out-of-sight. Conflicts between these *OstJuden* and the uptown *Yahudim* were legion, and inherent in the relationship.

The circumstances served as catalyst to the birth of yet another theological form whose very *raison d'être* was to be compromise, and whose direction would be lay rather than rabbinic, whether traditional or radical. There would be accommodation to the new environment but within the context of loyalty to the faith. There would be the middle-ground sought by the new immigrant and his children who still felt a tie to the “God of their fathers” but had been raised in the American milieu. As its name implies, this religious form would be “conservative” in its approach, as it sought to make peace with the New World.

The sensibilities of the founders aside, however, traditionalism, piety, strict observance were soon left behind or relegated to the poor and the lower classes. Large, powerful and fairly cohesive units were created or extended to serve as the lay, communal and rabbinic arms of American Jewry's more liberal branches. As these replaced the founders, values became institutionalized and soon found their way into doctrine. What may have begun as a search for a medium in the context of flexibility was to become a full-blown theology.

Everything else, particularly everything to the right of these new incarnations, was heaped together in yet a third form: Orthodoxy. The *kollelim*, the *yeshivot*, the *Hassidische welt*, the religious Zionists, the Agudah, “modern” Orthodoxy . . . a motley crew, indeed — were all heaped into the same pile, identified more in terms of what they were not than what they were.

The lack of clarity or cohesion in this third category bothered liberal theologians and analysts little because, at best, these were no more than vestiges. Surely one could not expect that traditional religious belief and observance, by whatever name, would survive the pressures and strains of an open society. Surely, groups noted for their obscurantism and, by their nature, isolationist, parochial and backward-looking, would neither take root nor prosper in the American environs. Orthodoxy would soon die, meld into one of the other two branches of Judaism or remain the identity of those few pietists who would live at the periphery of modern society.

## II

Somehow, it just didn't happen that way. What was assumed to be a death rattle was little more than a groan in response to the pains of adjustment. Dormancy was mistaken for expiration. Those very factors perceived as reactionary may well have been stabilizing and there seems to have been more vitality in the authoritative consistency provided than was earlier imputed. Its tenacity was impressive.

Part of the picture was framed by external events. The Holocaust, in itself as well as in its ramifications, had a profound effect. The very attack on the legitimacy of the Jew, upon his humanity, served as a shock to many who took their Jewishness for granted, indeed, to those who saw it as *passé*. The post-war arrival on these shores of east European sages and the remnants of once flourishing Hassidic communities offered graphic support for this reconsideration of one's heritage. It also reinforced already existing — though not yet self-conscious — Orthodox strongholds.

While these bastions of the right were regrouping, Orthodoxy's more liberal elements (yes, Virginia, they do exist) took great strength from the birth of the State of Israel in the wake of the Holocaust. While most Zionists were quite secular, the very concept of Zionism and its renaissance on the ancestral homeland was, at its base, highly traditional. It fulfilled messianic longings earlier repudiated by Reform Judaism. It represented the Jew acting on Biblical prophecies and rabbinic dicta, long eradicated from the world-view of liberal Jewry. It expressed an unwillingness to negotiate with the pressures of an alien environment — no matter how hospitable. Traditional Jewish practice would be written into the basic laws of the infant polity and its religious establishment would eschew liberalism. Zionism could do little other than vitalize the "modern" Orthodox, even as they perceived it to be *reshit zmiḥat geulatenu*, the first blossom of the Redemption.

It would be one more generation, however, before these early seeds would bear fruit. The move to professionalize, on the part of more secular and liberal Jewish elements during the forties and fifties, would not be visible among the Orthodox until the sixties and seventies. Today, however, traditionalism — and its institutional manifestation as Orthodoxy — has returned with a passion.

Witness: the growth of affluent, professional, Orthodox, suburban Jewish communities — complete with *mikveh*, *eruv*, (*glatt*) kosher butcher, *yeshivah* and *shomer shabbat* tennis club;

Witness: the increasing numbers of *yarmulkeh*-wearing interns, residents, house staff and attending physicians at major metropolitan hospitals and medical centers;

Witness: the broad presence of similarly attired university professors, attorneys and accountants in all phases of their callings;

Witness: the proliferation of thriving institutions and programs of study, prayer and support services geared toward the *Ba'alei Teshuvah*, those who would return to the tradition in both practice and outlook. The spectrum extends from the Lubavitcher Rebbe through Steven Riskin to Shlomo Carlebach;

Witness: the growing traditionalism within the Reform and Conservative establishments, reflecting a restive element (of longing?) within their laity;

Witness: (and this may be the most telling signal of all) the growing number of Orthodox professionals in positions of authority within well-established Jewish communal and defense organizations of clearly non-Orthodox bent. In the words of one old-timer surveying the attendance and affiliations of those at a recent meeting of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations: "Only in America . . ."

In a sense, this marked renewal and vitality of Orthodoxy has emerged in inverse qualitative proportion to the apparent difficulties within American Jewry's other branches. One need not belabor to this readership the growing rate of secularism, assimilation and intermarriage. Little needs yet to be added regarding the shocking threats posed by cultism and evangelical appeals. It is no secret, however, that these problems are far more pronounced among those whose ties to tradition, Judaic spirit and culture are tenuous, limited and confused. This is not to say that the issues are unknown within Orthodox circles or that there are none there who suffer from disaffection and confusion. It is to say that they are far less known.

As a corollary, one might view the matter pragmatically. It may be that liberal and progressive theology is not the wave of the future for America's Jews — if, indeed, it ever was. Compromise and accommodation was initially struck in the hope of stemming the very tides of which we speak: attract the youth, make the better-educated and the acculturated more comfortable in their religious environment. The compromises were made, but it seems that neither the young nor the upwardly-mobile stormed the gates of the synagogues nor did they flood the study halls as a result. And as for their children. . . .

The exodus from tradition, therefore, is fast losing even the utilitarian imperative and attraction that it once claimed. Editorially, the present convulsions within Conservatism over the ordination of females may

fall into the same category. Theology/Halakhah aside, those who feel — and there are many, particularly within the laity — that affording female ordination and greater female religious participation generally is a strategy for attracting or “keeping” their younger and more progressive elements, may well be in for a shock. Perhaps there is truth in the insight offered by the contemporary humourist, George Carlin. An Irish Catholic, Carlin claims that he did not leave the Church for reasons of deep moral principle. He left because he dislikes getting up early on Sundays. The moral issues came later.

Yet, these changes, introduced originally to accommodate the environment but unsuccessful in battling the forces of secularism and disaffection, have now been institutionalized past their utility. If by nothing other than the measure of pragmatism, they may be compared to the European-imported Orthodoxy of two generations ago. Both appear unsuited to their environment, yet claim the allegiance of devotees who cling out of sincere, if misguided, principle.

### III

In this sense, it must be borne in mind that what has developed as American Orthodoxy of the seventies represents, as well, a variety of compromises, which derive from the very values of professionalism and mobility that motivated liberals a generation earlier. One cannot attend a university and professional school without being affected. One cannot participate actively in the secular arena and not be influenced. One cannot partake of the material benefits of affluence and not undergo change. Surely the Orthodoxy of today, particularly but not exclusively its non-Hassidic elements, is far removed from that of the Elders.

If anything, though, its transplantation, its grafting upon the American root, has given it an unexpected vitality and flexibility. It appears to be confronting many of the challenges of modern and material values, both directly and indirectly. While neither defeating nor eliminating them, today's Orthodoxy seems to be demonstrating that it is not, *per se*, incompatible with traditional observances and beliefs. The proliferation of Continental or Oriental eateries, Caribbean cruises and Passover vacation packages, all under strict rabbinic supervision, serve witness to the fact that an upwardly-mobile, (conspicuous) consumer need not compromise his religious principles. The presence of regular services and classes in the chapels of metropolitan hospitals, university campuses and in the financial districts of many cities, makes the same point. One need not live in seclusion nor deny the world.

As might be expected, many of these developments are quite fluid. Most noticeable is a sense of insecurity in the changes that have been adopted and a general rightward stance that is reflected in observance as well as in the training and selection of clergy and teachers. Well within the best familial traditions of the past lies the desire of parents to provide



better for their children than they had for themselves. This aspiration is usually defined in material terms, but here it has taken an educational and cultural bent as well. Perhaps disturbed by lacunae in their own training, perhaps disaffected by the often heavy-handed methods which they encountered, these parents seek to provide for their children a better Jewish education than they themselves may have received.

Many are profoundly distraught by the insufficient preparation afforded them as students at full-time primary or secondary Jewish schools. The issues that they were to confront on the campus and in the "real world" were dealt with peripherally, if at all. The commitment to Jews elsewhere, as well as to the State of Israel, was rarely explored. Ethical values were under-emphasized by comparison with time spent on the rudiments of ritual observance and practice. The events of history — especially contemporary history — and the role of the Jew within them was a matter of ad hoc treatment and general indifference.

At the same time, many parents have become disenchanted with their experiences in the world of professional and higher education. They are less impressed with modernity and sophistication, perhaps for not having had to fight the ideological battles of the past. The very cosmopolitanism and progressivism that higher education is designed to instill has become passé. They would like to prepare their children better or, alternatively, to shield them altogether from such conflicts and tensions.

In some instances, this has resulted in an active involvement in local day schools and *yeshivot* for the purpose of introducing more sophisticated and socially-aware curricular materials and the engagement of instructors better able to convey them. In the best examples, its results are new programs of Holocaust studies, Zionism, Jewish life abroad, Jewish philosophy and Jewish history as well as actual study in Israel. While some of this is yet a bit trendy and faddish its introduction is promising.

In other instances, parents have been moved to send their children to primary and secondary schools far to the right of their own training, indeed far to the right of their life-styles. They hope to provide, thereby, a stronger and more secure Jewish foundation for their children, a less vulnerable *Weltanschauung*, a more comprehensive and complete commitment. Truth-to-tell, the results are ironic and often barely short of humorous and bizarre. Well-dressed suburban parents walk to *shul* with teen-age sons whose attire, complete with black suit, tie-less white shirt, and broad-brimmed black hat, makes them appear quite incongruous; children of professionals opt out entirely and decide that any form of secular higher education is not for them; affluent and upwardly-mobile parents have daughters who marry young men studying at a *kollel* and depending upon small stipends, parental largesse and the efforts of their wives. Parents who regret these developments should recognize that, whatever the motivation, these new conflicts are largely of their own making.

Finally, it appears that the new Orthodox generation and its institutions have often accepted a relatively insular position regarding those Jews who do not share their values. There is frequently lacking a willingness to participate in broader councils of Jewish welfare and concern if it will be necessary to share the podium with spokespeople of competing theological doctrine. There is a more profound unwillingness to proffer any form of implicit legitimacy to those of other branches of Judaism, even when the issues are neither theological nor ideological. In short, a sense of *klal yisrael* is often absent.

This lack is counter-productive from general, as well as self-interested, perspectives. Most issues that confront the Jews in America do not divide easily by the degree of one's religious observance or doctrinal purity. Those outside the Jewish community do not, and will not, understand the nature of that which separates us, and the already free proliferation of public dissent need not be given further impetus.

By the same token, the powerful and well-established Jewish organizations that make important fiscal and monetary policy regarding issues of vital importance to the Orthodox Jewish community will not easily be moved from without. Certainly, they will not be moved by external indifference. Concern about lending passive legitimacy or unintentional co-optation are real and require serious consideration. It should be clearly recognized, however, that the important goal of Jewish survival will not be realized in a vacuum and much can be derived from joint effort without impinging upon ideological commitment. Indeed, many of these efforts may be irrelevant to the shadings of ideological commitment. Truly, it would be a matter of tragic irony if the very tenacity and creativity that has created an Orthodox resurgence in the latter part of this century should be allowed to languish for an unnecessary and somewhat paranoid fixation with what lurks over the right shoulder.

# *History and Modern Jewish Thought: Spinoza and Mendelssohn on the Ritual Law*

MICHAEL L. MORGAN

A SENSITIVE READER OF SPINOZA'S *TRACTATUS THEOLOGICO-POLITICUS*<sup>1</sup> might conclude that Spinoza anticipates two important Jewish responses to the modern world: liberal Judaism and Zionism.<sup>2</sup> In fact, however, such a conclusion would be false, both because it is too narrow and too wide. First, it is too narrow for these are not the only responses that Spinoza anticipates. Another, the one that he rejects, is traditional Jewish orthodoxy.<sup>3</sup> Second, the conclusion is too wide, because the liberal form of Judaism that Spinoza anticipates is not, in fact, identical with what became liberal Judaism in the 19th and 20th centuries. The latter, like Spinoza's liberal religion, the universal faith of mankind, does have rational morality at its center; liberal Judaism has always emphasized ethics and morality as the special concern of the Jewish experience. But whereas Spinoza's liberal religion was solely concerned with morality, the performance of acts of goodness and justice, 19th and 20th century liberal Judaism has always wanted to preserve — to one degree or another — its Jewish character. For this reason, modern liberal Judaism has always struggled with the problem of the status of Torah and the *mizvot*, the laws or commandments of God.<sup>4</sup> Spinoza's liberal Judaism does not engage in such a struggle, for the moral dimension of Torah has its own justification while the non-moral or ritual dimension, ever since the destruction of the ancient Jewish state, simply has none.<sup>5</sup>

1. The standard edition of the *Tractatus* can be found in the third volume of the Heidelberg Academy edition of *Spinoza Opera* (1924–26), edited by Carl Gebhardt. The most convenient English translation is still R.H.M. Elwes (trans.), *Benedict de Spinoza: A Theologico-Political Treatise and A Political Treatise* (New York: Dover, 1951). This is a reprint of Elwes' 1883 translation, originally under the title *The Works of Spinoza*, Volume I.

2. See especially Elwes, p. 56, (G. III, 57) and Chs. IV, V, XIV, and XV.

3. See Elwes, Chs. I–XV.

4. For a particularly important example of such a struggle, see the controversy between Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig regarding the status and role of the *mizvot*, in Franz Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning* (New York: Schocken, 1955), pp. 72–92, 109–124. For a traditional response, see Eliezer Berkovits, *Major Themes in Modern Philosophies of Judaism* (New York: KTAV, 1974), Ch. 4.

5. See Elwes, Ch. V.

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Reflections like these may lead some to conclude that Spinoza's anticipation of liberal Judaism is a chimera. What he, in fact, anticipates is not a form of Judaism at all, but, rather, assimilation into the universal faith of all mankind. This view suggests that what Spinoza's *Tractatus* does, by anticipating assimilation, orthodoxy, and Zionism as responses to the plight of the Jew in the modern world, is to leave open the liberal Jewish option.

It would be wrong, I think, to view Spinoza's primary legacy to Judaism in this light. While it may be true that he never did come to grips with the problem of uniting his "moral faith" with the particularity of Jewish ceremonial observance, and while it may be true that his rejection of Judaism occasioned unfairness in his reflections on Judaism,<sup>6</sup> its principles and main figures, still he does contribute a central insight to an understanding of Judaism: the contours of Jewish experience and the reflective comprehension of that experience in thought are fundamentally exposed to historical events in ways that liberal Jewish thought, so wedded to German idealism, has consistently failed to appreciate. This is what justifies serious reflection on his work, the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

The first liberal Jewish thinker is Moses Mendelssohn.<sup>7</sup> This is so not because Mendelssohn was a liberal Jew, for he was not. He is, however, the first serious thinker to seek a middle road between assimilation and orthodoxy, to advocate the centrality of rational morality for Judaism (and all religion) and then to try to justify the continuing Jewish obligation to the ceremonial law. In a sense, then, Mendelssohn takes up the Spinozistic gambit and, with a certain amount of subtlety, solves the liberal Jewish problem of justifying the continuing obligation to ritual law. The solution is, however, a weak one and ultimately unsatisfactory; as a middle road, it lacks the sternness of the two extremes, universal moral religion and orthodoxy. But what is more unsatisfactory still is the very attempt, for it develops from too ready an acceptance of Spinoza's alternatives and too narrow an appreciation of the truth in Spinoza's own view. In short,

6. For a discussion of this "unfairness," see Leo Strauss' Preface to the English translation of his study of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (Schocken: New York, 1965), esp. pp. 15–28. See also Isaac Franck, "Spinoza's Onslaught on Judaism," JUDAISM 28, 2 (Spring, 1979): 177–193.

7. Unquestionably, the outstanding study of Mendelssohn's life and thought is Alexander Altmann, *Moses Mendelssohn* (University of Alabama Press, 1973). Also valuable is Michael A. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967), Chs. 1 and 2. Of some value to a philosophical discussion of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* are: Julius Guttmann, "Mendelssohns *Jerusalem* und Spinozas *Theologisch-Politisches Traktat*," *Achtundvierzigster Bericht der Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin*, (1931), pp. 33–67; Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy* (Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 324–339; David Patterson, "Moses Mendelssohn's Concept of Tolerance," in *Between East and West: Essays dedicated to the Memory of Bela Horowitz* (London, 1958), pp. 149–163; Simon Rawidowicz, *Studies in Jewish Thought* (Phila.: Jewish Publication Society, 1974), Ch. 10; Steven S. Schwarzschild, "Do Noachites Have to Believe in Revelation?," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 52 (1961–62): 297–308 and 53 (1962–63): 30–65.

Mendelssohn took from Spinoza the wrong things; he went to the doctor for a cure but caught the illness instead. Mendelssohn radicalized Spinoza's absolutism, his view that all true religion is rational morality, and cleansed Spinoza's view of Judaism of its historical taint. He rejected, or overcame, Spinoza's important concession to history, the fact that the destruction of the Jewish state made the ceremonial laws of Judaism defunct. But Mendelssohn did not see that, whereas Spinoza was wrong in fact, he was right in principle. The ceremonial law *was* transformed after the destruction of the state and not only then and not only in substance but, also, in status. Vulnerability to history is ruled out by Mendelssohn. Nothing radical occurs between Sinai and the coming of the Messiah, when God, in as public and explicit a fashion as at Sinai, will revoke the law once and for all. In this regard, we learn a greater lesson from Spinoza than from Mendelssohn. The loyal, devoted Jew's defense of Judaism and the ceremonial law is meager and unsatisfying when compared with the rebel's attack on it.

In order to see this and to comprehend how Spinoza and Mendelssohn differ, we must look in detail at Mendelssohn's argument in *Jerusalem*.<sup>8</sup> The pamphleteer who had written "The Search for Right and Light" accurately identified the nub of Mendelssohn's view in the Preface to the German translation of Mennaseh ben Israel's *Vindiciae Judaearum*. If the ceremonial laws of Judaism are obligatory only because, as laws, they are institutionally backed by threats of punishment, e.g., excommunication or *herem*, then, by denying religious institutions the right to excommunicate, Mendelssohn had, in effect, undermined Jewish particularity by undermining the authority of the Torah and, thereby, the justification for particularly Jewish conduct. Such a criticism suggested only two alternatives consistent with "intellectual probity": either to defend the authority of the ritual law or to abandon Judaism for liberal Christianity, which was, for all practical purposes, identical with natural religion. In *Jerusalem*, Mendelssohn chooses the defense.

The central thesis of *Jerusalem*, the goal toward which Mendelssohn's very precise argument<sup>9</sup> is always aimed, is that even without the threat of institutional excommunication, Jews are still *obligated* to perform the ritual law. One way to introduce the argument that leads to this conclusion is to notice a strange feature of Mendelssohn's defense of it. At the time of the writing of *Jerusalem* and shortly thereafter, Mendelssohn frequently addressed himself to this question of ceremonial observance; in his letters and other writings, however, he gave not one justification but, rather,

8. All references to *Jerusalem* are to Alfred Jospe (trans. & ed.), *Jerusalem and Other Writings by Moses Mendelssohn* (New York: Schocken, 1969).

9. Far and away the most extensive treatment of that argument is in Altmann, pp. 514-552. Helpful discussions, especially of Part I of *Jerusalem*, can also be found in Patterson and Nathan Rotenstreich, *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston: 1968), ch. 1.

three. He says quite straightforwardly that modern Jews are obligated to obey the ritual law because

- (1) that law contributes in a special way to the attainment of moral virtue and ultimate human happiness,<sup>10</sup>
- (2) observance of that law will serve as a unifying bond, keeping the people of Israel together,<sup>11</sup> and
- (3) God, the sole legislator of that law, has not publicly revoked it; hence, it is still in force.<sup>12</sup>

At first glance, these three justifications for ritual obligation do not appear to be the same, nor is it apparent how they are interrelated or even how Mendelssohn might have thought that they were. Rather, they seem to be three independent responses to the Searcher's provocative challenge. But this is intellectual overkill; why offer three solutions to the same puzzle unless there is some question about their effectiveness or about their sufficiency or plausibility? Of the three, which is, or which are, the answers of *Jerusalem*? Do they supplement each other or are they independent and even redundant justifications for ceremonial observance?

Mendelssohn begins *Jerusalem* with a theory of the liberal state, a rudimentary theory that utilizes the notions of right, duty, and contract in order to explain the genesis of the state and the scope of its authority. It is a theory of the liberal state because it values highly individual freedom and, especially, the "freedom to think what one wants" — freedom of conscience or belief. Indicative of the state's limited authority is the unrestricted respect that it gives to such freedom. For, as Mendelssohn tries to show, the very nature of belief and knowledge, indeed of thinking, makes it impossible to allow or tolerate governmental intervention. The only genuine justification for constraining individual choice and actions comes as a matter of mutual protection and civil security. Mendelssohn's state is liberal through and through.

Such a state comes into being as a result of a social contract made by mutual consent in a condition of natural need. The debts to Hobbes and Locke are explicit. And there are other debts, too, for example, to Rousseau and to Spinoza.<sup>13</sup> Mendelssohn's strategy is this: first, he must show why, in fact, religious institutions do not have the right, whereas civil institutions do have the right and, hence, the authority to force people to act in certain ways. Then, he must show why, even without this authority, Jewish ceremonial law is, nonetheless, obligatory.

On Mendelssohn's view, the state arises as a regulatory agency in order to supervise transfers of goods and services. It develops an apparatus for regulating permissible transfer — *via* bequests, purchases, investments, taxation and public expenditures, etc. — and another for

10. See Jospe, pp. 56–99.

11. See Jospe, p. 148.

12. See Jospe, pp. 104–5.

13. See Altmann, p. 520.

regulating impermissible ones — for example, theft, injury, kidnapping, rape, etc. Individuals, in order to reduce the risk of being harmed or robbed and, thereby, gain peace of mind, give to a neutral institution the authority to coerce their actions; one gives up the prospect of uninhibited acquisition by whatever means one is capable in exchange for security, the freedom from being victimized in just that way.

Although it is not our purpose to examine Mendelssohn's theory of the liberal state and assess its truth or falsity, it is especially interesting to identify in it his abiding rationalism and optimism regarding human nature. The entire edifice rests on conviction, *pace* Hobbes, that persons in a state of nature do have rights and duties and, also, that they will act on the basis of rational deliberation. Although he never argues for such a view, Mendelssohn sees law as derived from certain primitive, basic, natural moral prerequisites in human nature; in this he shares a good deal with many modern political thinkers. At the same time, this optimism with regard to human capacity is not boundless; the need for law expresses a correlative appreciation for human limitation. And this appreciation for irrational motivation and its results suggests to Mendelssohn that the state views actions and their meaning in a special way.

Mendelssohn gives no theory of action in *Jerusalem*. He does not discuss the notions of reason and cause, intention and desire and deliberation, all of which have been centrally important to such discussion from Aristotle's time to our own.<sup>14</sup> But he does make one important distinction: he observes that law coerces action by threatening punishment, and it does so by distinguishing an action from the intention of the agent and trying only to concern itself with the former. In so far as the law is able, it understands actions independently of their agents' intentions and solely in terms of the harm, injury, etc. that they would typically cause. For this reason, law may prevent an action that was initiated for noble purposes; it may also permit actions that are ignobly devised. It does, then, run the risk of impeding virtue and permitting vice on occasion, but it does so by trying to discourage the greatest likely amount of harm and injury compatible with the minimal constraint on individual liberty.<sup>15</sup>

All of this — Mendelssohn's theory of the origin of the liberal state, his account of its authority and its limits — might lead one to ask: how does this result in a difference between religious institutions and the state? Surely, if belief cannot be coerced, then religion can no more demand conviction than the state can. And do not religious institutions arise as a

14. Modern discussions include Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism*; Stuart Hampshire, *Thought and Action* (New York: Viking Press, 1959); Anthony Kenny, *Action, Emotion, and Will* (Routledge and Kegan Paul [Princeton University Press: 1970]); G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, N.Y. 1966); Hector-Neri Castaneda, *Thinking and Doing* (Dordrecht: D.R. Reidel, 1975). For a recent account of these themes in Aristotle, see Anthony Kenny, *Aristotle's Theory of the Will* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979).

15. Jospe, p. 46.



result of agreement and consent? Why is it, then, that Mendelssohn denies to them the authority to coerce action? His answers to these objections merge from attention to two details of his account: (1) the requirements for genuine contract and, hence, for legitimate transfer of authority to a single institution and (2) the separation between intention and action.

First of all, does a religious institution really originate from a contract? Mendelssohn's response is that in the case of religious institutions there is no contract and, hence, no establishment of a regulatory agency to arbitrate disputes, because the relevant parties do not find themselves in a situation of colliding interests. There are, in other words, no conditions that give rise to contracts. And without a contractual arrangement, there is no transfer of authority and, hence, no right to coerce. In a state of nature, the relevant parties are persons with needs that they can fulfill out of their own resources and needs that they cannot fulfill without the help and cooperation of others. In a protoreligious situation, however, the relevant parties are man and God, and the situation is not one of colliding interests. Both man and God want the same thing — human virtue and happiness. To be sure, man does depend on God for his very existence and for the order of the natural world with only its rare interruptions. But these are granted as gifts and require not regulation by a third party as much as grace by the giver. In the relationship between man and God, harm and theft are impossible; neither party has either the need or the desire to overwhelm the other. The church or religious institutions, then, do not arise as regulatory agencies governing the conduct between man and God.

But this is only part of the reason why religion has no coercive authority. One might respond: perhaps the religious institution is not a "third party" but, instead, a representative on earth of the Divine Power itself. If so, its authority would derive from God who has that authority as Creator and Sustainer of all things. For Mendelssohn, however, this position is impossible. Whereas the state protects freedom and guarantees peace, the purpose of religion — which is God's purpose, too — is human virtue and its rewards, happiness and human fulfillment. The state and religion, then, complement each other; the state protects freedom, and religion expresses freedom in the life of virtue. Hence, while the state, in order to protect maximum liberty, must separate intention or belief from action and constrain only the latter, religion, in order to encourage virtue, cannot do so. Religion must treat intent and act as a unity; it must encourage right action performed for right purposes. The end of religion is virtue, and virtue cannot be the result of force or compulsion. In terms that Kant will later make famous, moral excellence, to be moral at all, must be autonomous.

There is, then, no way that the church can acquire the legitimate authority to coerce either beliefs or actions. Since it does not arise from a contract, it cannot acquire that authority from individuals, and since its

goal is virtue, the church cannot acquire that authority from God. Mendelssohn's conclusions are precise: neither civil nor religious institutions ought to coerce beliefs, which are immune to all compulsion. And only the state can coerce action.

The first part of Mendelssohn's task is complete; Judaism has no authority to coerce either moral or ceremonial acts — the first because virtue cannot be compelled and the second because no religion has the authority to coerce *any* action. The Searcher's question must now be answered: why, then, should the modern Jew be obligated to ceremonial observance? The moral obligation to practise virtue is still present even if — and, in truth, perhaps just because — there is no “legal” obligation in force. But why perform ceremonial acts? Without the force of legal obligation or something akin to it, is there any obligation at all? Spinoza's answer was — no, none at all.<sup>16</sup> But Mendelssohn disagrees, and his disagreement occupies the whole of Part Two of *Jerusalem*.

There is a part of Mendelssohn's account of Judaism and his response to the Searcher's challenge that is very well-known, and I shall not dwell on it. Mendelssohn's rationalism and his universalism are both influential in his three-fold description of Judaism as natural religion, historical truths, and revealed legislation. His effort to identify what Judaism has in common with all genuine religion — that is, morality — and what uniquely distinguishes it — in particular, its revealed ritual law — had tremendous impact, both positive and negative, on Jews and non-Jews.<sup>17</sup> In a sense, however, this account is merely background to the central discussion of the authority of the ceremonial law, and the nature of that authority is our prime concern.

Suppose we begin by asking a question of Mendelssohn that is inspired by Spinoza. *Jerusalem* was written in 1782. Is the source or foundation of the Jewish obligation to ceremonial observance different in 1782 from what it was before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., i.e., during the period of the existence of the second Jewish State? Does the Contemporary Jew have the same obligation as the Pristine Jew?<sup>18</sup> Mendelssohn himself seems to appreciate the force of such a question, for he actually discusses the original purpose of the ceremonial acts and why they were obligatory when the state existed. In his *Tractatus*, Spinoza had argued that the purpose of the ceremonial law was the physical well-being and security of the state. Hence, when the state was destroyed, the need

16. See Elwes, Ch. V.

17. For example, on Kant and the early Hegel, Nathan Rotenstreich discusses the treatment of Judaism in these and other thinkers in *The Recurring Pattern* (New York: Horizon Press, 1964). The most profound treatment of Kant and Hegel on Judaism is in Emil Fackenheim, *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), Chs. 2 and 3.

18. See Elwes, Ch. V. The terms “Pristine Jew” and “Contemporary or Diaspora Jew” are mine. They refer to the Jew of the Second Commonwealth and the Jew thereafter, at least until the late 18th century.

for ritual observance was also destroyed. Furthermore, since the need was civic security, the source of authority was political as well. As long as the religious and civil institutions were the same, the religious obligation was, in reality, a political one. When the state ceased to exist, not only did the need for ritual observance disappear, but the very authority to demand it ceased as well. For Spinoza, the break between Pristine Judaism and Contemporary, i.e., Diaspora, Judaism is radical.

Mendelssohn must avoid these conclusions; he must separate the ritual law from the state both in purpose and in the source of its obligatory character. For him, Diaspora Judaism is not radically different from Pristine Judaism; they are, rather, continuous forms of Jewish life and experience. One is the natural successor to the other. Or, to put it in other terms, the justification for, and authority of, the ritual law must be timeless; there must be no sharp break before and after 70 C.E. Now, one way to solve this problem would be to begin by acknowledging, with Spinoza, that in the period when the state existed religious and political authority were united. But Mendelssohn would have to go further and say that this authority was not the only reason why the ritual law was binding. There would have had to have been another source of ritual obligation, a source connected with the morality that has always been at the core of Judaism. Such a two-fold scheme would be able to weather the storm of history, for only one of the two reasons or sources would cease to be effective when the state was destroyed in 70 C.E. While that event would have shattered the unity of civil and religious authority, it would have had no effect on the subtle relationship between ceremonial observance and the attainment of moral virtue.

We cannot proceed further without describing what this "subtle relationship" is. For Mendelssohn, the core of Judaism, as for all genuine religion, is natural religion. This religion of nature or reason was thought to have two components: first, a moral imperative that obligated all rational agents to practise moral virtue and to attain as high a degree of self-perfection as possible and, second, a set of eternal truths, the knowledge of which was thought to be necessary to satisfying that imperative.<sup>19</sup> In part, the imperative called on persons to use their reason and thereby to become maximally free, liberated, that is, from the bondage to irrational desire and passion. It called on them to do the right for its own sake, but to recognize that moral virtue would be rewarded with happiness and well-being. Confidence in such a moral imperative, however, required the knowledge that man was free; without such knowledge the attempt to increase one's freedom would have been irrational, if not simply foolish. For reasons like this, knowledge of God's existence, human freedom, and

19. Much of this conception of a religion of nature or a rational moral religion goes back to Spinoza. In the *Tractatus* (ch. XIV especially), in Spinoza's account of the "universal faith of all mankind," one already finds both the imperative and the dogmas later endorsed by Mendelssohn.

other eternal truths was considered a prerequisite for moral perfection. Mendelssohn's conviction was that the peculiar role of Judaism and, especially, its ritual laws arose as a result of the erosion of this moral imperative and knowledge of the truths required for it. People, that is, had forgotten the eternal truths and, therefore, were unable to respond to the imperative. For this reason, God provided the Jews with a means for recalling those truths and, thereby, for reviving the aspiration to moral perfection. But the means had to be one that would not, itself, become an object of special reverence; God did not want to run the risk of idolatry. So He instituted no normal, stable system of symbols but, rather, a set of actions that would serve as a "living kind of script, as it were, stirring heart and mind, full of meaning, stimulating man to continuous contemplation."<sup>20</sup> The ultimate purpose of the written and unwritten laws is salvation or moral perfection.<sup>21</sup> Their immediate purpose, however, is to prescribe conduct that would facilitate recollection of those truths, knowledge of which is necessary for that moral perfection. Hence, Mendelssohn's strategy is to tie ritual obligation to the universal obligation to moral perfection and to do so instrumentally, as a means serves an end.

The instrumental role of the ritual law, then, is one source of ritual obligation during the period of Pristine Judaism. If, as Spinoza thought, another source is the fact that civil and religious authority together rested in one sovereign will, that would provide the two-fold basis for ceremonial observance. Hence, when the state was destroyed, in Mendelssohn's view, neither the need nor the source of authority would cease, for since both are moral, neither is tied to historical change.

It would be convenient if this were Mendelssohn's account, but is it? Not exactly. To be sure, much of Mendelssohn's concern in Part Two of *Jerusalem* is devoted to making the case for ceremonial observance as a "living script"; this seems to be his prime reason for the continued ritual obligation in Diaspora Judaism. But it is not the only reason. In *Jerusalem*, as in the comments on Bonnet, Mendelssohn remarks that the law remains in force until the lawgiver publicly revokes it.<sup>22</sup> Such a revocation God has not performed. For this reason, too, the ceremonial law remains obligatory even though the state no longer exists.

And, as if two reasons were not sufficient, in a letter to Herz Homberg, Mendelssohn gives a further one.<sup>23</sup> The ritual law, he says, is no longer the living script that it once was. But amidst atheists and anthropomorphists the Jewish people still has a purpose. The role of the ceremonial law is like a unifying bond, keeping the Jewish people together and alive.

20. Jospe, p. 74; cf. p. 71.

21. Jospe, pp. 98–9; cf. pp. 90–156. Also see Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 300–301.

22. Jospe, pp. 104–5 and 155.

23. Jospe, p. 148.

We are encouraged, by the casual way in which Mendelssohn introduces these latter two explanations and by the elaborate development of the first, to think that, in fact, Mendelssohn did not regard the three as unrelated. Indeed, he may have seen them as different ways of expressing one explanation for ritual obligation in 1782.

Many of the same considerations that make Mendelssohn's "living script" account a plausible one while the state existed continue to operate after its destruction. Ceremonial observance may not have the same vitality and force that it once did to revive the memory of those eternal truths; still, the need is there. Indeed, if we keep that need in mind, we can understand how the unity and continued survival of the Jewish people might be instrumental to the achievement of public and private moral virtue. If we identify the purpose and role of the Jewish people to remind the nations of those requisite eternal truths, then the observance of the ceremonial laws is not the mechanism for such a reminder but a means of keeping the people alive as well. Hence, the Jew's obligation to it is instrumentally founded in this double sense and derives ultimately from a prior obligation to "love one's neighbor," i.e., to charity and benevolence. In this way, the unity account and the "living script" account complement each other.

The other reason, that the law is mandated as long as its legislator has not publicly revoked it, is less plausible. Surely the laws of a defunct nation are also defunct, whether or not the original lawgiver revoked them or even lived to revoke them. It can hardly be a necessary condition of a law's lapsing that the original legislator or legislative body exist and actually revoke it. Legal codes are too adaptive and too flexible for that, as they should be. Presumably, Mendelssohn would have to argue that the case of the *sui generis* Jewish state differs from that of normal states. Perhaps the difference lies in the lawmaker who, in this instance, is infinite and, hence, uncompromising. But surely this cannot be what distinguishes the present case and thereby maintains ritual obligation, for that ceremonial law *has*, in fact, undergone extensive change.

Perhaps some sense can be made of this somewhat odd claim if we ask ourselves what it is that God has not publicly revoked and what it was that formed the original content of His legislation. This question requires an indirect response.

We have suggested that the "living script" account, when adapted to the Diaspora Judaism existing after 70 C.E., is a plausible one. But it does have flaws, and one of these must be attended to now. To accept the account, one must identify some symbolic relation between the ceremonial acts of Jewish life and those eternal truths, knowledge of which is necessary for moral virtue and happiness. Such a symbolic relation, however, is difficult to describe, if possible at all. Might Mendelssohn have thought that certain ritual actions would not symbolize eternal truths in the conventional sense? Rather, they would symbolize them in the sense

that perception of these actions would stimulate the recollection of those eternal truths *long associated with them*. They would do so presumably because, at an earlier stage in the development of the Jewish people, God Himself had fixed the association of *these acts* with *these truths* when He established this particular round of conduct for the Jewish people. Thus, in the period of Pristine Judaism the nations became accustomed to associate a specific set of ceremonial practices and a specific set of beliefs or doctrines or truths with the Jewish state and its people. In their minds, for example, the people who ate no pork and did not mix milk and meat were believers in a single, incorporeal God. After the destruction of the state, these actions remained; what was forgotten — both by the Jewish people and by others — were the truths that God Himself had associated with them. Therefore, by continuing to observe the ceremonial laws, Jews were expressing a hope that these acts would stimulate in them and in others the recollection of the requisite truths and their ultimate moral purposes.

Suppose we grant this account of Mendelssohn's views. What, then, does Mendelssohn mean when he says that the Lawgiver has not revoked the ceremonial law? Why are ritual acts no longer a living script? What original purpose is it that is lost to modern Jews? The answers to these important questions turn on our understanding of what God's original legislation was and how the original purpose of those ceremonial laws was somehow implicated in that legislation. On this reading God had established *two* things at Sinai:<sup>24</sup>

- (1) the obligation to perform certain ceremonial acts and
- (2) the *connection* between these acts and the eternal truths, knowledge of which is requisite for salvation.

Furthermore, this *connection* which God established is not necessarily a symbolic one, except in the widest sense; it is, rather, a relation of *association*, very much like what holds in people's minds between Sherlock Holmes and his hat and pipe. To be sure, just as a perceived object that stimulates recollection may be alike or similar to the recalled object, one being a copy of the other, so it *may* be that, to Mendelssohn, the ceremonial acts as a "living script" were somehow *like* the truths with which they were associated. But, even if we grant this as part of God's original purpose and, hence, true for Pristine Judaism, we need not take it to be part of the justification for ritual obligation as it exists now. Since it is hard to conceive of how the likeness or similarity would be described, we do better, I think, to treat the truths and the acts, for Diaspora Judaism, as associated but dissimilar.

What is it, then, that God did not revoke? It is both the laws and this connection between them and the eternal truths. He also did not — because He could not — revoke man's moral purposes, his striving for

24. In the realm of what, for Mendelssohn, would have been ritual law only.

virtue and happiness. Therefore, in the midst of moral failure and religious corruption, it is no wonder that Mendelssohn saw no reason to discontinue the observance of the ceremonial law. To advocate its continued obligation was to hope that its capacity to stimulate recollection of those eternal truths was still present and to acknowledge that it was still needed.

Mendelssohn's three reasons, then, are, in fact, all ways of expressing one that is, in the end, the one that provides the foundation for Jewish obligation to the ceremonial law *always* — or nearly always. That is why Mendelssohn can differ with Spinoza over the impact of the demise of the Jewish state. For Spinoza, the ceremonial law is a human law, formulated to cope with historical problems of physical well-being and civil security. For Mendelssohn, however, the ceremonial law is divine and, for this reason, very much akin to the moral purposes of justice, benevolence, and the pursuit of happiness. For Spinoza, the relation between the ceremonial law and the divine moral law is mediated by the state; when the state dies, the relation is broken. But, for Mendelssohn, the relation is immediate; on this basis he can claim that a Judaism composed of natural religion and revealed legislation is a genuine unity, and the destruction of the Jewish state has no effect on it. Religious particularity and moral purpose are an eternal marriage.

On reflection, then, Mendelssohn, in his relentless rejection of the historical, becomes the godfather of modern Jewish absolutism; his natural heirs include Herman Cohen and, oddly enough, Franz Rosenzweig, both cavalier in their dismissal of Zionism. Spinoza, on the other hand, arch-rationalist and anti-empiricist that he was, reveals himself as the unexpected ancestor of Zionists like Pinsker and Herzl. For he, a vigorous rationalist and opponent of the influence of history on truth, also appreciates the role of history in determining the contours of Judaism and Jewish life. To be sure, to Spinoza, history corrupts; the experiences of historical man are confused and inadequate. Hence, a Judaism exposed to history is sure to die. But his motives notwithstanding, there may be more truth in Spinoza's denunciation of Judaism than in Mendelssohn's advocacy of it. Mendelssohn's love for Judaism shows itself everywhere, most of all in his dauntless struggle to unite Jewish commitment with rational liberalism. Spinoza's brilliance far exceeds that of Mendelssohn, but, in comparison, his love for Judaism is paltry. Yet, perhaps Spinoza's bequest is greater; what he could not give with his heart he gave with his mind, a paradoxical victory for reason if there ever was one.



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# Mr. Sammler's Planet Ten Years Later: Looking Back on the Crisis of "Mishpocha"

SOL GITTLEMAN

SAUL BELLOW'S *MR. SAMMLER'S PLANET* represented, as did no other work of American literature, the final confrontation between Jewish children and parents of the 60s generation. In fact, one might say that Bellow's novel climaxed a century of Jewish writing with the pre-occupying theme — from Sholem Aleichem's Tevye to Bellow's one-eyed septuagenarian Sammler — of the father who fails. Of course, Tevye and Sammler have different kinds of problems. Tevye finds himself confronting a world not of his making and children who respond more to outside forces than to those of tradition. Both Hodel and Chava fall under the spell of pre-revolutionary Socialism and marry men who are destined to play roles outside of the *shtetl*. When forced to choose between parent and spouse, Tevye's daughters unflinchingly abandon their home. Chava marries a gentile, "a second Gorki," she says. We can measure the extent of Tevye's comprehension by his response: "So who was the first Gorki?" Tevye's wife, Golde, abandoned by her children, dies of a broken heart. Without them she has nothing to live for, Tevye tells Sholom Aleichem in "Tevye Goes to Palestine" (*Tevye fort keyn Erets-Israel*).

Sholom Aleichem uses Tevye and the break-up of his family to chronicle the disintegration of the *shtetl* world of Eastern Europe during the final decades of the nineteenth century, when literally millions of young Jews abandoned the world of their fathers for more promising hopes in the New World. In typical Sholem Aleichem fashion, the author steps back from any strong commitment to one position or the other. Tevye himself possesses no great insights into his children's thoughts. Hodel and Chava, for that matter, are not selfish, thoughtless, or even particularly self-centered children. The world has caught up with them and left their parents behind. "You'll never understand," Hodel tells her father, as she waits for the train to take her to Siberian exile to join her husband. She weeps, as does Chava, who convincingly argues that God created people equal, and that Jew and gentile do not necessarily have to

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hate one another. However, for Tevye, the sight of his daughter talking to the gentile town clerk, Fyedka, fills him with rage, and their eventual marriage signals the end of his world. Sholem Aleichem looks on with a kind of Chekhovian detachment.

Nearly a hundred years later, still another Jewish father wonders about the future of his world, but we are no longer concerned about the *shtetl*, which disappeared under the onslaught of Stalin, Hitler and time. Artur Sammler is as much a Jewish Everyman, created by an author with a purpose, as is Tevye, even if the times have changed. Saul Bellow, in 1969, looked back on the social history of the Jewish family in America since the great waves of immigration, and lamented the state of things. His particular rage is directed against a generation of indulged, decadent, and ignorant revolutionaries who have rejected all the reason and rational thought which Bellow's generation had come to cherish, in favor of a glorification of instinct, uninhibited and insatiable pleasure, and non-negotiable demands.

The scene is New York, for Bellow a jungle of anti-social life, where pickpockets and police share a mutual indifference to the needs of a terrorized citizenry. Artur Sammler is living out the last years of his life surrounded by ignorant student revolutionaries from Columbia University, half-baked young *Luftmenschen* eager to make a buck no matter what the moral price, and neurotic and sexually unstable Jewish youth who seem totally cut loose from any sense of genuine purpose other than the gratifying of their desires.

Saul Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is perhaps the most bitter anti-youth diatribe which the defensive and middle-aged Jewish intellectuals of the late 60s produced. In a kind of conscious reversal of the cliché, you cannot trust anyone under thirty, especially if he or she is Jewish. Sammler's own daughter, Shula, is a deranged survivor of the Holocaust, a surveyor of New York City trash cans, and her father cannot stand living with her. He also has a good deal of difficulty with his by, courtesy, great-niece and -nephew, Angela and Wallace Gruner, the children of his benefactor and relative, Elya Gruner, who rescued Sammler and his daughter from a DP camp at the end of the war. Both Angela and Wallace are deep in analysis and particularly enjoy pouring out their sexual phantasies to Sammler. They are self-indulged failures living off their father's wealth, indifferent to the needs of their father who is dying of an aneurism. In fact, the only pleasure that these two men share is with each other, going over genealogies from the old country, and enjoying a mutual enthusiasm for Israel.

But, in their own right, Bellow is suggesting, the sins of the fathers come home to haunt them. Both Sammler and Gruner are less than perfect parents. Sammler was a very indifferent Jew in the 1930s, a Bloomsbury Englishman preferring to associate with refined intellectuals of the British establishment. He discovered his Jewish identity almost acciden-

tally when World War II broke out while he was visiting his wife's family in Poland, and there he observed the mass murder of Jews in an open pit out of which he miraculously escaped. Sammler joined the Partisans, learned to kill, and came to America as a survivor who has come to understand the basics of human communication. He reads the Bible and learns to understand the dignity of love. His nephew, by courtesy, Elya Gruner, has been a Mob doctor, making a great deal of money illegally and paying little attention to his children.

But, it is on the children and the young people that Bellow's anger primarily falls. He is savage in his denunciation of their lack of family orientation, their disregard for the sense of *Mishpocha*. They care neither about their parents nor each other. They are self-centered, eccentric, and go out of their way to hurt. Gruner's son, Wallace, quite naturally champions every cause which might irritate his father: he is pro-Cuba, pro-Arab, a petted, indulged

genius of liberty . . . he nearly became a mathematician, nearly became a physicist, nearly a lawyer, nearly an engineer, nearly a Ph.D. in behavioral science. Nearly an alcoholic, nearly a homosexual . . . A young man with stunning gifts. It was puzzling.

Yet, for those who understand Bellow's rage, it is not puzzling. *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is a broadside, perhaps the most polemical novel of a polemical decade, a fiery attack on an all-rejecting Jewish youth that have gone too far. What they condemn is everything that Bellow has come to admire: the liberalism and rationality of intellectual exchange, the fair-mindedness of his own personal sense of commitment as a member of the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. But, for the youth generation of the 60s, all of that liberalism meant nothing, and Bellow shared the pain of rejection.

*Mr. Sammler's Planet* is really about the Jerry Rubins, the Abby Hoffmans, the Susan Saxes, and the Mark Rudds, and it is a screaming and, at times, shrill denunciation. In passing, Bellow makes common cause with those who had come to detest New York City in its moment of crisis ("Of course the phone was smashed. Most outdoor telephones were smashed, crippled. They were urinals, also. New York was getting worse than Naples or Salonika. It was like an Asian, an African town, from this standpoint") and the civil rights movement ("No, he didn't have much use for the romance of the outlaw. Angela sent money to defense funds for black murderers and rapists. That was her business of course"). Throughout the book the reader can detect a hardening of Bellow's political posture. It is strongly pro-Israel, anti-Russian, and, philosophically, Bellow is not at all far removed from Oswald Spengler's vision of the decline and fall of the West. Throughout the novel one senses that Israel must come to rely on its own toughness, not on the soft and increasingly decadent allies who cannot cope with their own problems.

By the later years of the sixties, Bellow had marshalled his forces, as

had those of his generation who were now prepared to come on the offensive. *Mr. Sammler* represents the first sign of a new coalition, of a new direction. The Jewish intellectuals of Bellow's generation were, in a sense, girding their loins for a struggle, and this novel was a very important signal. A host of disenchanted and bitter old-line liberals were undergoing a profound philosophical re-ordering of priorities and they responded dramatically to the very identifiably Jewish nature of revolutionary youth in America. For them, the novel ushered in a period of ideological change which is still going on. The fathers are still on the offensive. Norman Podhoretz, Irving Kristol, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer and many others who make up the very identifiable new Jewish conservative coalition are still breathing the spirit of old Artur Sammler and the Saul Bellow of ten years ago. The children haven't heard the last word yet from them.

But in the seventies Bellow showed clearly that, in spite of the outrage, he could not fall easily into a kind of reactionary politicization of his works. *To Jerusalem and Back* is, for the most part, a loving and reinforcing commitment to his Jewishness and to his sense of belonging. *Mr. Sammler's Planet* was a one-shot attack, helping Bellow to get a great deal of anger out of his system, but he has gone on to other things, to other ideas.

# *A Study in Ambivalence: Arabs in Israeli Fiction*

MENAHM D. ROTSHEIN

## I

AS A UBIQUITOUS FEATURE OF THE LANDSCAPE of Erets-Israel, Arabs have figured prominently in Hebrew literature since the earliest days of this century. Indeed, any writer who has spent some part of his life in Erets-Israel and who has not discovered a way of rendering some dimension of the Arab-Jewish dialectic in literary terms, is a notable exception. Poetry may not be excluded from this generalization, but since, almost by definition, it perceives and objectifies different qualities of experience than does fiction, and does so in a manner more restrained and rarefied, it is harder to make the same claim with an equal amount of certainty.

A wide-angle survey of Hebrew fiction written in Erets-Israel in the first half of the twentieth century will demonstrate the prominence of Arabs — both as individuals and as members of a group — even long before their presence assumed its current extraordinary political and social significance. It is well beyond the scope of this article to present the full range of fictional compositions which have addressed themselves to this issue; however, mention should be made of the pioneering contributions by writers of the second and third *aliyot* (1904-1914, 1919-1924, respectively). The stories and novellas of Y.H. Brenner, Y. Horovitch and M. Vilkansky, (but not those of Moshe Smilansky and Moshe Stavsky,) show that Arabs were all too often perceived as conniving, malevolent and untrustworthy. Yet these writers, like their contemporaries who came from an Eastern European setting, were at times irresistably drawn to an undefinable mystique which apparently emanated from Arabs as a people. This fact surely helped lend that somewhat ambivalent quality to their works.

In the late twenties and early thirties, as a more closely defined Arab ideology emerged in response to Jewish national claims and deeds, it became evident that the naive and self-centered attitude projected in earlier Hebrew literature toward the Arabs of Erets-Israel would have to be re-examined, modified or replaced entirely. What may have hastened this process is, to some degree, a simple biological factor. Veteran writers

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of European origin, who showed little or no tolerance for what was alien to them, were gradually replaced by a generation of artists born or bred on the reclaimed ancestral soil.

Yet, while to the younger cadre of writers the Arab-Jewish conflict did furnish a primary common time and place reference, it did not necessarily signal a complete departure from the patterns of relationship and interaction established earlier. Both structurally and thematically, a distinction still obtained between works in which the Arab was assigned a major role either as protagonist, catalyst or as arbiter for particular moral suppositions, and those in which he was featured merely as a literary convention.

Most of the examples presented are drawn from the works of major authors and were produced during the early, euphoric days of statehood and those which immediately followed. One ought to note that, though the segments presented echo a much less solicitous tone vis-à-vis Palestinian Arabs and their plight than does more recent Israeli fiction, they do not bear the firm sense of self-worth and collective resolve that is generally attributed to the literature of the 1940s.

## II

One may understand something about the tenor of Hebrew fiction in the early days of statehood by selecting for closer observation a number of diverse works which acknowledge certain presuppositions about Arabs, either as individuals or as members of a specific culture.

As a group, Arabs are at times represented as inferior beings: disease-ridden, ignorant and, for the most part, contemptible. The most glaring example of this type of characterization, though masked by irony not easily discernable, is S. Yizhar's memorable portrayal, through the eyes of a young Israeli soldier, of the denizens of an Arab hamlet called *Hirbet Hiz'a*. The story takes place during the War for Independence. A company of soldiers enter the area and, encountering no resistance, they proceed to round up all of its inhabitants for deportation. One young mother is holding her infant daughter

... dangling about like a useless object, a greyish-complexioned child, thin, sickly and stunted ... We were revolted. The mother had apparently seen (this reaction) as a sign of victory for she began rolling the miserable creature about, dressed as she was in filthy rags, while holding on to her with one hand ...<sup>1</sup>

There follows an eerie scene in which some soldiers happen upon two wizened old women clothed entirely in black, sitting upon a precipice:

We jumped ... toward them but were immediately repelled by the sight. Two aged women ... crouched motionlessly ..., monsters reeking of the

1. S. Yizhar, "*Hirbet Hiz'a*" in *Shiv'a Sippurim*, (HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 1971), p. 82. All of the translations in the article are my own (M.D.R.).



fetid odor of a dug-up grave. Something inhuman. Sickeningly foul. Their eyes a shell-blue staring out of a withered, mouldy face — perhaps in paralyzed fear, or just in meaningless stupor.<sup>2</sup>

Not only the individual, but the entire human community, even the hamlet itself, is portrayed as menacing, flawed in spirit and unsightly in its features.

It is much better to remain standing all day long than to sit on this ground, . . . sick and filthy in its utter loathsomeness — the ground on which several generations have been spitting and urinating and upon which the dung of their camels and their cattle had been heaped — those stretches of soil right next to the cottages, contaminated by foul remains of human habitation, so crowded and so pitiful.<sup>3</sup>

In fairness, one ought to point out that Yizhar applies an equal measure of harshness in portraying the invading company as a whole or any of its individual members. Slovenly, ragged and foul-mouthed, the Israeli soldiers taking part in the operation are, for the most part, men for whom little sympathy is expressed. Yet there seems to be an implication that their moral lassitude and physical wretchedness are actually the result of contamination, of having come in contact with the virus of a disease endemic to the Arabs in the captured hamlet. Thus, while Arabs appear as loathsome beings for whom disease and uncleanness represent a permanent, even a natural state, the soldiers' own quite similar appearance and demeanor is perceived as being only temporary, and is implicitly justified by mitigating circumstances.

Let me turn to another example which reflects a similar attitude toward Arabs, this time without the assuaging balm of irony which Yizhar provides in "*Hirbet Hiz'a*." The story, "*Par'oshim*" (Fleas), was written by a contemporary of S. Yizhar, Yehoshua Bar-Yosef, during the same period when the first story appeared, in 1949. The "fleas" in the title are swarms of the pest which descend upon the unsuspecting soldiers-occupiers of a nameless Arab village following the expulsion of its inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> The writer proposes that

the fleas were nothing more than the vivid representation of the pervasive filth. At first the soldiers were amazed at how those Arabs can live, one generation after another, amidst all this squalor. But later on they just stopped wondering.<sup>5</sup>

2. Ibid., p. 59.

3. Ibid., p. 40.

4. It may be worth noting how the two stories, by Yizhar and Bar-Yosef, though vastly different in tone and character, lend themselves to sequential arrangement. It would not be inconsistent to regard the fleas that "have visited upon" the soldiers in the latter story even as a form of punishment for "sins" committed, thus lending the story strong Biblical undertones.

5. Yehoshua Bar-Yosef, "*Par'oshim*", in *Et Vashelah*, ed. Efrayim Talmi (Tel-Aviv: M. Nauman, 1950), p. 35.

Gradually, as the story unfolds, the Israelis not only adjust to the scourge of the fleas, but actually begin to take on the appearance, temperament and actions of the selfsame benighted peasants whom they had replaced.

In less than a month the men underwent a total metamorphosis. If only their uniforms had been stripped and someone were to dress them as Arab peasants, and if their speech had been different, one would barely notice the distinction between them and the ones whom they chased away. They were as filthy as the others. Just like them they, too, were immersed in laziness in the heat of day. They, too, were afflicted by sores, rolling in muck, cursing and swearing just for the hell of it. They, (like Arabs), gaze with hungry eyes upon something beyond their possession, while dreaming strange, passionate dreams charged with lust and desire, blood and murder.<sup>6</sup>

These images are harsh, drawn from the stock vocabulary of the bigot and leaving almost no room for pity. What is expressed here is the age-old fear of the unknown, the quality which informs all myths and which, when ossified, fosters those emotions which sow dissensions between nations, groups and individuals. Once again, it is clear that in spite of the fact that Bar Yosef's soldiers have assumed the worst attributes of the Arab peasants, their predicament and situation represent but a temporary aberration, an involuntary state from which most will emerge in due course, ready to resume their interrupted studies and go back to shops and offices. Living as they are compelled to is an annoyance to those men, "it was maddening. More than that, it was embarrassing. But even more than that, it was readily degrading."<sup>7</sup>

Whether or not these highly subjective portrayals represent the authors' own positions on this matter, their very expression must itself be taken as an approximate representation of widely-held impressions of Arabs and of the way they live.

A rather interesting indicator of one ethnic group's attitude to another, it seems to me, is the use of epithets as a common form of reference. Generally speaking, the number and varieties of epithets about Arabs in Hebrew literature is extremely limited (a fact which alone should not be dismissed as insignificant). However, some are to be found in a number of stories of the middle-to-late forties and even in later ones. Such terms as *Arabush*, *Arabchik* and *shahor*, particularly the last two, seem to connote a state of superiority by the user of the term, a *de haute en bas* attitude, it may be called.

Natan Shaḥam, in his novella, "*Tamid Anahnu*" (It is Always We, 1952), as well as Yigal Mossenzohn in "Sergeant Green" (1946) and in the novel, *Mi Amar Shehu Shahor* (Who Said that He Is Black, 1948), allow many of their Jewish characters to use these epithets freely. The diminutive, *Arabchik*, quite obviously signifies weakness, if not insignificance and

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

is, thus, clearly contemptuous. The use of *shehorim* (blacks) in reference to Arabs is quite prevalent among the young soldiers in S. Yizhar's *Yemey Tsiklag*. One of them says:

We don't call them "Egyptians" and not "the enemy," nor do we call them "intruders," just plain "*shehorim*". Is that because (the term) disgraces them more (than any other?) Or is it to avoid sounding overly rhetorical? Perhaps we use it to emphasize that we are the white ones; not just because of the soap, the toothbrush and our lineage, but because white is good and black is bad, and what that means is that we deserve to win. The god of the whites is supreme. Isn't that so?<sup>8</sup>

Mossenzohn employs the same term in a rather unusual way in "Who Said that He Is Black." There, in one scene, a group of Arab men are pictured seated around a bonfire, celebrating their raid on a small Jewish *kevuṣah* from which they have just returned. Obviously elated by their experience, one of the men starts singing a mellow love song, and is immediately joined by other celebrants. One stanza says the following:

My beloved, Oh honest folk,  
Who said that he is black?  
He is whiter than cheese and cream  
Sweeter than sugar is he,  
Tastier than figs.<sup>9</sup>

In this context "black" assumes a much less malevolent significance. Yet, the negative connotation of "black" is not totally eclipsed, but reemerges, perhaps even more powerfully, due to the vicious character of the singers and to our knowledge of the dastardly acts which they have committed.

That "black" as an epithet appears as an unmistakable reference to Arabs even in Amos Oz's early story "*Artsot HaTan*" (Lands of the Jackal, 1965) is a measure not only of the term's currency and acceptance, but also of its utility, for Oz employs it in a somewhat different sense than do his predecessors. In the minds of his central characters "blackness" has been firmly fixed as all that is uncivilized, threatening and foreboding. As I have noted above, for the boys in the trenches of the '48 war, "black" can signify anything ranging from "filthy" to "murderous," but while it connotes several negative images, it never quite signifies death itself, as it does for Oz in this story.

A strikingly different attitude is one which portrays Arabs as untame, unpredictable and fiercely proud individuals whose ancient ways are shrouded in mystery. This perception of them as "noble savages" is often accompanied by an expression of inadequacy on the part of the writer toward his own ability to come to terms with the hostile environment. Not coincidentally, one may discover that, at times, even a trace of guilt (at having invaded someone else's domain) is in evidence in certain works.

8. S. Yizhar, *Yemey Tsiklag*, Vol. I. (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1958), p. 302.

9. Yigal Mossenzohn, *Mi Amar Shehu Shaḥor* (Sifriyat Poalim, 1948), p. 182.

A good example is Dan Ben-Amots's, "*Al HaGamal V'HaNitsahon*" (About the Camel and the Victory), which appears in his first collection of short stories *Arba'ah Vearba'ah* (1950).<sup>10</sup> This is a straightforward story with a somewhat more intricate plot. In his opening sentence the narrator states: "I wanted to see people making war, and so I went with them."<sup>11</sup> Arriving at the front, he observes the shelling of an Arab village, which is shortly followed by the flight of its inhabitants. At a distance he picks out a lone camel grazing among the cactus plants. One of his companions urges the narrator to shoot the animal. At first he balks and protests, being quite obviously revolted by the idea, but, feeling that his refusal may brand him a coward and the laughing stock of everyone back home, he finally takes aim and kills the beast.

In the camel's grace, nobility, detachment and patience the narrator finds reflections of himself as he is, rather than of what he would have liked to become. Killing the camel, as he is compelled to do here, shatters forever in the narrator's mind the myth of virility and superiority which so attracted him to the front lines in the first place. But perhaps even more than that, the act contributes to the destruction of the last remnant of an idyllic ethos ("the camel's paradise"), causing the narrator to remark sadly that, as a result, even God remains more distant than ever.

"*Hirbet Hiz'a*", S. Yizhar's previously mentioned short story, may also show, though quite paradoxically, some aspects of that so-called "other Arab" now being introduced. Among the wretched, the untouchables and the obsequious, one lone woman and her son stand out in marked defiance. The narrator describes her thus:

There was something different about her. She appeared so strong, restraining herself, hardened by her sorrow. Tears, seemingly not her own, rolled down her cheeks. . . . She looked like the only one who knew exactly what was happening here. So much so that I was ashamed to face her, so I lowered my eyes. . . . We saw how proud she was, too proud to pay the least bit of attention to us. We understand that right there (in front of us) stood a lioness of a mother; . . . she didn't want to break in front of us, now that everything which she possessed was gone. In their pain and anguish, rising way above our own wicked existence, they moved on . . .<sup>12</sup>

The portrayal of Arabs as sympathetic figures, possessing in certain instances even enviable human qualities, seems necessarily inconsistent with the soldiers' view of themselves as somewhat larger-than-life, an image which some fledgling Israeli writers were not loath to foster. Yet the exceptions to this rule are not all that rare.

In an otherwise self-indulgent and unabashedly chauvinistic account of his wartime experiences, *Bisedot Peleshet 1948* (In the Fields of the Philistines), Uri Avnery introduces a short story called "*Hashavuy Haka-*

10. Dan Ben-Amots, "*Al HaGamal V'HaNitsahon*", in *Et Vashelah*, p. 26.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

12. "*Hirbet Hiz'a*", pp. 84-85.

tan" (The Little Prisoner).<sup>13</sup> It is one of four brief fictional sketches, all of them inspired by the actual events to which the volume as a whole bears historic testimony. The title of the story refers to an Arab youngster who alone refuses to leave his ancestral village before the advancing Israelis reach it. Asked by one of the soldiers why he has chosen to stay behind, the boy exclaims: "Because this village is mine. It's mine! Mine!" Eventually he becomes something of a servant and errand boy to the new occupants, one of whom, Raffi, practically adopts him as his son. The strange relationship between the hardened, fierce soldier and the barefooted, proud youngster, absolutely fascinates the other soldiers. They warn Raffi of dangerous consequences; mistrust, suspicion and derision are the prevailing attitudes expressed here toward Arabs. One bright morning the boy and his donkey disappear, and Raffi immediately gives chase in his jeep. He follows the boy as the latter enters a deserted hut in a neighboring village, also apparently deserted, where he sees him lean over a shriveled old man covered in black rags. He hears him whisper to the old man: "I am Hassan Ibn Dervish. I brought you some Jewish food which I took from their kitchen. Eat. Don't be afraid, I'll be here each day to feed you."<sup>14</sup>

Considering the work as a whole, this story seems unique. For lack of a better term, Avnery refers to it in the introduction to the book as his most "pacifist" story. Actually, the writer does little more than lend to the Arab of this narrative a certain humane dimension, though one may imagine that, at the time and under the circumstances in which the work was published, this by itself must have required a measure of daring. Curiously, Avnery was spared the abuse and vilification (critical as well as public), which accompanied Yizhar's work when his own somewhat sympathetic account of an Arab prisoner was published in November, 1948. One might assume that, aside from the obvious fact that Yizhar's empathy for the victims was undisguised and his protesting voice much shriller, Avnery was an infantry regular at the time of the story's appearance and his accounts had an ingratiating "from-our-boys-at-the-front" tone about them.

Ben-Amots, on the other hand, by resorting to a clever literary ruse, has simply camouflaged his intentions. The three stories were written and published approximately within one year of each other. The radical direction which the writings of both Ben-Amots and Avnery assumed in the 1960s and 70s could not fully have been foreseen in the late 40s. It is common knowledge that both of these men far surpassed Yizhar in pleading the cause of the victims of the first Arab-Israeli war.<sup>15</sup> What is interesting, however, is that all three authors have moved beyond the

13. Uri Avnery, *Bisedot Peleshet 1948; Yoman Keravy* (Tel-Aviv: N. Twersky, 1949), pp. 229-236.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

15. Avnery's espousal of leftist ideas has taken the form of active political engagement in numerous fringe groups; he has even succeeded in being elected to serve in the Knesset for more than one term. He is also editor and publisher of the weekly *Ha'Olam HaZeh*.

confines of fiction and have chosen such avenues of expression as journalism, fictionalized history, essays and satire in an attempt to disseminate their message to a wider and, perhaps, more sophisticated readership.

### III

While the representation of character may be claimed as one of literature's primary means of realizing its various objectives and intentions, it is seldom divorced from other elements, both internal and external. Considering the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is not surprising that so much effort has been expended in the direction of establishing the rightful ownership of the land to which both sides lay historical claim.

Let me state at the outset that, for the most part, contemporary Israeli literature tends to regard the Arabs as deserving a share of the land referred to as Erets-Israel by virtue of having established deep, continuous roots in the soil, by virtue of their hard work and dedication and, also, perhaps, by having demonstrated their adaptability to the specific conditions which exist there. At the same time, there is a clear implication that wherever Jewish designs and achievements do not infringe upon Arab claims, and where Jews have proven their equally serious commitment to working, improving and defending the land which they have reclaimed, they must be allowed to remain and establish roots of their own.

Itshak Shenhar's "*Ha'Eshel*" (The Tamarisk, 1942) may perhaps serve as the clearest example of what I would call the "neutral" view. In this story the tamarisk is the tree beneath which both Jew and Arab seek to establish a home for themselves. In fact, they both succeed in doing so, but not at one and the same time. The tree, a synecdoche for the ancient land itself, sprouts forth in the dawn of time, "having appeared unnoticeably, planted by no human hand."

Long before either Arab or Jew established claim to it, the land witnessed many ancient tribes and peoples coming and going. At some point in the fairly recent past a peasant called Muḥammed asks to lease a parcel of land from a comatose effendi and proves himself an industrious worker, plowing, sowing and reaping in due season. He loves his land. Beneath the ancient tamarisk he constructs a modest hut; there, too, he buries several of his infant children. Years later, when he is offered a sizable sum of money by agents of a Zionist society to vacate the land, Muḥammed agrees to move elsewhere. But unable to establish a foothold in any other place, Muḥammed then turns in desperation to highway robbery.

When a *kevutsah* is established at the site of Muḥammed's former home, an old watchman, named Yemini, is appointed to guard the land. He lives alone in a wooden hut built at the foot of the tamarisk. One night Muḥammed returns, intent on raiding the *kevutsah*. Yemini is slain defending his post, and "his blood flows down to the root of the tamarisk." Months later, under the very same tree, Muḥammed, too, is killed in an

argument by a member of his own gang, and his blood, as well, "flows down to the root of the tamarisk." In death as in life the land does not distinguish between men.

Shenhar does not come out unequivocally for either side on the historical argument, as is reflected in this story. He seems to imply that the land ought to belong to the one who is willing to make the greater sacrifices, who cares the most and who remembers. (Here the name "Yemini" assumes a certain well-known connotation.)<sup>16</sup> The only ones who earn the writer's contempt and derision, and who become the butt of his satirical barbs, are those who either stand to profit financially from the land or who love it only from afar, through their generous contributions.

Shenhar's resistance to historical oversimplification is certainly exceptional, as is his apparent neutrality, attested to in his work. Most younger writers admit, some without reluctance, that Arabs do have a valid claim, if only by virtue of their occupation of the territory when the latter-day return to Zion movement began. Older writers, particularly those representing the second and third *aliyot* (1904-1924), may believe otherwise, but few of them are bold enough to say so.

Shelomo Tsemah, representing the latter group, wrote a short story in the thirties called "*Pirhey Remiah*" (Flowers of Deceit), in which the narrator, an industrious young *halutz*, is embarrassed to admit to an Arab co-worker that he knows next to nothing about gardening. Rather than ask for guidance in planting precious tulip bulbs, the young man chooses to ruin half the batch by planting alternate bulbs bottom up.

Ibrahim stood near me, observing my strange method of planting, and marvelling at our sharp, Russian intelligence. But I knew that I was cheating, and that made me very unhappy.<sup>17</sup>

Though this is but a minor episode within the story, the moral ambivalence which runs through it is of obvious significance, if only because Tsemah chose a title with a direct reference to this episode.

A more recent story, Binyamin Tammuz's "*Ma'ase Be'ts Zayit*" (The Story of an Olive Tree, 1964), contains certain obvious parallels to Shenhar's "*Ha'Eshel*." Where they differ, however, is in the clear implication made by Tammuz that Jewish settlers who have come from Europe are not only an element alien to the environment, but that they possess none of the attributes which would permit peaceful integration, even if they have the desire to make a new niche for themselves in Erets-Israel. A similar point is made with much greater urgency in Tammuz's most

16. While "Muhammed" may represent a form of metonymy, which here stands for Arabs in general, "Yemini" is by no means an ordinary appellation. The name is not clearly designated as being either a proper name or a surname. Instead, it recalls the famous oath taken by Jews who were exiled to Babylon: (referred to somewhat ironically elsewhere in the story,) "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand (*yemini*) forget her cunning" (Psalms, 137:5).

17. Shelomo Tsemah, *Sippurim*, Vol. I. (Jerusalem: Yedidim, 1966), p. 357.



recent novel, *Requiem Le-Na<sup>c</sup>a man* (A Requiem for Naman, 1978), and is a theme which runs steadily throughout his fictional works where Arabs are represented. They are regarded, in these works, as a natural force, an integral part of the physical geography of the land. Both Shenhar and Tammuz regarded the Arabs as a natural force.

The hero of the story by Tammuz is Maḥmūd Tawill, who inherits a sizable grove of olive trees, among which is "an old and venerable tree aged more than one thousand years . . ." <sup>18</sup> Maḥmūd's village contains six or seven such trees, "which were the symbol of the antiquity of their owner's family and of the greatness of their lineage." <sup>19</sup> When war comes, Maḥmūd and his family flee across the border into Lebanon, abandoning their ancestral home. The new settlers of the village, Mendl Tishler and his kin, find little use for the trees and allow their wood to be used for carving souvenir camels, which some enterprising merchant intends to export to Jews overseas.

In an earlier story by Tammuz, "*Hekan Otta Dereḥ?*" (Where is That Road Now? 1950), the narrator is seen searching for his lost childhood, a search which takes him back to the Palestine of the Nineteen Thirties. The technique of looking backward from a period when the State of Israel is going through the hardships of post-war recovery, as it tries to cope with the insurmountable problems created by large-scale immigration, helps create in the mind of the narrator/traveler an impression of the Thirties as an idyllic time. The irony here, no doubt, must lie in the fact that only the very recent past (Mandatory Palestine) is made to represent "history," or the historical argument for one party to the conflict, whereas the historical claim of the Arab's side is much more convincingly put forward by the Tawill dynasty in "*Ma<sup>c</sup>ase B<sup>c</sup>ets Zayit*."

Yigal Mossenzohn, in "Who Said that He Is Black," is quite aware of the validity of the historic claims upon Erets Israel made by the indigenous Arabs and, therefore, he tries too obviously to balance them, by quoting supportive Biblical references which show that the Jewish link to that land predates that of the Arabs by many centuries. Still, what may work in the context of partisan rhetoric falls flat and rings hollow when uttered by characters who have never made secret their contempt for holy texts of the old variety. This may explain, in part, why one hardly finds the Bible used by contemporary Israeli writers in advancing the historical argument and why, on occasions where there are references to "The Book," as in Yizhar's *Yemei Tsiklag*, the bite of irony is so ferocious. <sup>20</sup>

18. Binyamin Tammuz, "*Ma<sup>c</sup>ase B<sup>c</sup>ets Zayit*", in *Sipur Anton Ha<sup>3</sup>Armeny* (Tel-Aviv: Maḥbarot LeSifrut, 1964), p. 53.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

20. When the novel was nominated for Israel's most prestigious literary award, the Bialik Prize, in 1958, it sparked such an acrimonious debate among the judging panelists that the awarding of the prize was suspended for that one year, the first and only time that such a decision was made in the forty-seven year history of that tradition. In the following year, however, Yizhar did receive the "Israel Prize" for distinguished literary achievement. The latter is a highly honored, albeit much more recently established award.

What is clear in the Mossenzohn story is that, despite the attempts made to turn the attack on Na<sup>c</sup>ama into a modern-day battle against the Midianites, even the most idealistic of characters, the old farmer Abramov, cannot help but wonder whether, in the course of stubbornly clinging to every patch of the soil, something dearer has not been irretrievably lost.

We gave back to this land her strength with the aid of chemical and organic fertilizers, (he says) without noticing how we ourselves turned into a piece of barren land capable of sprouting nothing but crabgrass.<sup>21</sup>

Regarded as a fixture of the inhospitable environment, Arabs have forever challenged the imagination of Hebrew writers who made their home in Erets-Israel. The heightening hostility produced by the clash of wills between the Jew and his neighbor, fostered a need to create an Arab literary persona consistent with some of the worst fears and prejudices. During the time between the end of the War of Liberation and the Six Day War, the physical separation of Israeli Jews from Arabs living within Israel and without, coupled with the air of imminent external calamity, served to fix these negative images in the popular imagination, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Notwithstanding the ironic undertones in some of the works of Yizhar or Tammuz, departure from the prevailing attitudes of uninformed suspicion and mistrust was rather uncommon. The "positive" Arab who appears from time to time in the literature of the Sixties is usually found in a setting like Mandatory Palestine, as in works by Hurgin, Shahar and HarEven. For others, notably Amos Oz, the Arab remains very much an object of terror and dread, albeit a fascinating one. Of late, however, Israeli fiction has demonstrated sufficient evidence of genuine, even agonizing, wrestling to rid itself of preconceived stereotypes.

The more recent daily contacts between Jews and Arabs, an ironic consequence of a fierce military engagement, have served to heighten markedly each group's sensitivity toward the other. Such encounters, taking place on a plane free of overt aggression, must have far-reaching consequences which may ultimately render obsolete what remains of the images and impressions presented in this study.

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21. Mossenzohn, "*Mi Amar Shehu Shaḥor*", p. 233.

# ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO PRINT ABOUT JEWS ISN'T IN THE NEW YORK TIMES (OR THE WASHINGTON POST OR ON CBS)

Some of our best friends report for the general press. But when they write on the critical questions of Jewish survival and the future shape of Judaism they write for **Present Tense**, published by the American Jewish Committee.

In every issue there is news about Jewish life—written from the heart and the spirit—found nowhere else in the world. Here is a sample of the knowledge \$10 a year buys:

**On American Jews:** "For the first time in American history, American Jews feel secure enough in their Jewishness and in their Americanism to challenge major aspects of this country's foreign policy." Stephen Isaacs.

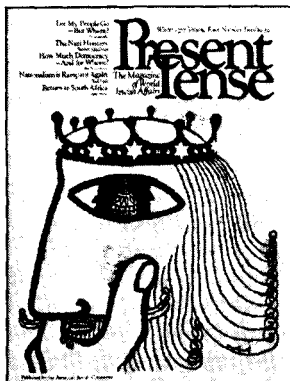
**On Soviet Jews:** "The historic turning-point was the trial in 1970 of eleven foolish, naive young people who hoped to steal a small airplane and fly to freedom in Scandinavia." Murray Seeger.

**On searching for roots in Eastern Europe:** "Where was my mother's home? Where was the path she must have walked to the Narew River she had told me about? Where was the synagogue and where was the market place?" Sigmund Diamond.

**On Jerusalem:** "No place on earth offers so many delights to the eye, the ear and the mind as Kollek's Jerusalem, but one must find the time to stand and stare." Chaim Bermant.

**On renewed interest in Judaica among young Americans:** "The young people perceived themselves as survivors of the failures of Jewish education and the false values of America." Sylvia Rothchild.

**On Israel's Nature Reserves:** "It may be that General Yoffe's animals will somehow lead the people of the Middle East to peace one day. But the tanks were in the mountains, waiting. The real beast in the desert was still man." Robert Spero.



**On being a Jewish poet:** "The truest Jewish poetry will be written out of the inward preoccupations of people who happen to be Jews." M. L. Rosenthal.

**On the Persian Gulf arms race:** "The ramifications of what is happening... extend from the Caspian Sea to the Suez Canal and from the African Coast to Pakistan." Tad Szulc.

**On Israel's Arab intellectuals:** "I am an Israeli but I cannot be a Jew." Naomi Shepherd.

**On American foreign policy:** "American companies, which for

so long we have considered 'our companies,' have in fact become the policing agents of the Arabs' boycott against the U.S." Paul Dickson.

**On South Africa:** "To live with such a system of laws, with certificates of racial purity, with leaders who admired Hitler, to live in South Africa as a Jew and to be silent and happy takes some special skills." Rose Moss.

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# PRESENT TENSE

The Magazine of World Jewish Affairs

## REVIEWS

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### Messianic Visions

*The Messiah Texts.* by RAPHAEL PATAI. Detroit. Wayne State University Press, 1979. liii + 373 pp. \$17.95.

*Revelation and Redemption: Jewish Documents of Deliverance from the Fall of Jerusalem to the Death of Nahmanides.* By GEORGE WESLEY BUCHANAN. Dillsboro, N.C. Western North Carolina Press, 1978. vi + 632 pp. \$29.50

*Reviewed by* IRA ROBINSON

BELIEF IN A messiah son of David who would come and save them from their subjugation by the nations of the world was well nigh universal among the Jewish people in pre-modern times. But the breakdown of the traditional Jewish consensus on the binding nature of the *halakhah*, which marked the onset of the modern period of Jewish history, witnessed as well the dissolution of the traditional Jewish messianic idea for the non-Orthodox. Nevertheless, secularized spinoffs of messianism, not least among them the Zionist movement, have flourished and continue to influence the lives and thoughts of contemporary Jewry.

For good and ill, messianic belief has put its stamp on the Jewish character and runs like a scarlet thread through its history, providing a theme for a vast outpouring of literary works as mystic and rationalist, talmudist and poet speculated on the scenario and timing of the ever-expected End of Days.

Until now, the messianic treatises, poems, prayers and legends were readily available only in the original. For those people not possessing a sufficient mastery of the frequently difficult Hebrew and Aramaic in which the literature

of redemption was written, this entire genre of Jewish literature, containing within it an important key to the understanding of medieval Judaism, has remained virtually a closed book. An anthology of Jewish messianic literature in translation was clearly to be desired.

As so often happens, this need has recently been filled by not one but by two parallel collections, one compiled by Raphael Patai, the anthropologist and Biblical scholar, and the other by George Wesley Buchanan, whose major work has been in New Testament studies. The two books deal with the same genre of literature and the choice of documents is frequently the same. Nonetheless, there is a great deal of difference in the editors' approach to the subject, a difference which seems to stem largely from their respective backgrounds.

In *The Messiah Texts*, Patai is intent on conveying to the reader the messianic *legend* in all its ramifications. In so doing he has consciously chosen to exclude from his purview "nonlegendary" statements on the messiah and the messianic age. These include scholarly speculation on the messianic era and calculations of the date of the messianic advent. Also excluded are accounts of the long line of messianic activists who believed that they were, if not the messiah himself (although some clearly did), then his prophet or forerunner who would be able at least to initiate the messianic process and thus force God to intervene in history and redeem His people.

It is, of course, entirely within Patai's prerogative to exclude those items from his anthology, and it must in fairness be said that in doing so he has excluded texts which would involve the modern reader in a decidedly unedifying

journey through a jungle of involved interpretation of Biblical verses and a confusing welter of numerical calculations. The messianic legend can, indeed, stand without the aid of such texts.

On the other hand, without these texts of messianic speculation and, surely, without some account of the messianic pretenders and visionaries, the work, as a whole, necessarily suffers. The legend did not exist in a vacuum. It flourished in a society which saw the legend as a reality about to unfold. To concentrate on the legend alone is artificially to separate part of the complex of ideas and hopes which were, to most medieval Jews, the ultimate reality.

With this *caveat*, Patai's book does its job well, and is a pleasure to read. It is well organized into chapters which trace the progress of the messianic legend from Biblical beginnings to contemporary ramifications. The translation is accurate and as flowing as the midrashic nature of most of the texts will permit. Though, in Patai's scheme of things, integral texts tend to be chopped up so as to fit in more than one of his chapter divisions, this is a matter of taste and cannot be faulted since it makes for greater comprehension as the reader is introduced to the different elements of the Jewish messianic legend. The texts are respected and generally allowed to speak for themselves with the minimum of commentary necessary for comprehension.

Buchanan's *Revelation and Redemption* differs from *The Messiah Texts* in several ways. It attempts, first of all, to be all-inclusive with regard to Jewish messianic phenomena, including documents on messianic movements and scholarly speculation as well as descriptions of the messianic legend. Its temporal scope is more modest, leaving off, as it does, in the late thirteenth century with the death

of Nahmanides, thus virtually ignoring the vast amount of messianic literature composed in the ensuing centuries. Also, unlike Patai, Buchanan tends to translate whole texts.

But, if Buchanan's structural approach to the texts is only somewhat different from Patai's, his conceptual approach is radically different. His work, though dealing entirely with a genre of Jewish literature, is addressed not to Jews but specifically to Christians. He wrote the book because he feels that many Christian theologians and students of the New Testament have missed the point in their interpretation of New Testament eschatology, thinking of it as other-worldly and having little to do with this-worldly military and political realities. In order to prove this interpretation to be mistaken, Buchanan has brought out this lengthy anthology to demonstrate that Jewish messianism has always involved a this-worldly solution of the Jewish problem: the messianic reestablishment of the Jewish state and the subjugation of the gentiles. This book, then, is a preparatory study of New Testament eschatology in his intended commentary on the *Revelation of John*.

As a Christian scholar addressing his fellow Christians on his discoveries in Jewish literature, Buchanan must be counted in the long and honorable tradition of Christian Hebraists who delved into the texts of Judaism in order the better to understand the background and nature of their own faith. Nonetheless, the book must be judged not merely as a contribution to the understanding of the New Testament but also as a contribution to the understanding of Jewish history. In the latter evaluation, the book fails on several counts.

Though he has obviously made great efforts to study medieval Jewish history, Buchanan does not pos-

sess sufficient background in this area, and he has allowed some glaring errors of fact and interpretation to creep through. Thus, he generalizes from descriptions of a prominent Jewish upper class in the early medieval period that the Jews as a whole, throughout the middle ages, were wealthy international traders and merchants. This generalization, which may have had some relevance to conditions in pre-Crusade northern Europe, has little relationship to the realities of Jewish life in the Muslim orbit where a small upper class presided over a community of artisans and petty traders. In the post-Crusade period, Jewish prominence in international trade had largely vanished and, despite individual cases of wealth, Jews were, on the whole, reduced to a less and less viable economic role in society. That Buchanan misses the entire point of this evolution of Jewish status in the middle ages is shown when he attributes the suffering of Jewish communities during the period of the Black Death, when they were accused of spreading the disease, to their role as international merchants — a role they had been forced to relinquish centuries earlier.

Among Buchanan's other major errors of fact and interpretation is his persistent identification of the Ten Tribes of Israel, who were exiled by the Assyrians and were to return in force in messianic times, with the Samaritans, whose group presence in Palestine postdated the exile of the Ten Tribes although they occupied roughly the same territory. Concerning Jewish-Christian relations during the period of the Crusades, Buchanan says that, "since Jews were intent on being the rulers [of Palestine], Jews and Christians fought throughout the Crusades, contesting for control of Jerusalem after the Moslems were defeated" (p. 111). Jews did

fight against Christians during the Crusades — but to defend themselves against massacre, not for control of the Holy Land.

Beyond the historical errors of fact or interpretation, the book suffers from translations which are often poor and sometimes unintelligible. One messianic figure, Abu-Issa of Isfahan, was also called *Ovadia*, which could be rendered as Obadiah or literally translated as "servant of God." Buchanan translates *Ovadia* as "Ofid of God (servant of God)" (p. 178). On the same page, he renders the name of the Caliph of that period, al-Mansur, as "Elmantzar," clearly a transliteration of the Hebrew transliteration of the original Arabic, since his source was not the original but rather Aaron Z. Aescoly's Hebrew translation. The book is also very poorly edited. In one passage, for instance, we consistently read of "Moses son of Maimonides" (p. 198). In the index, we find the following entries for Maimonides: Maimon, Rabbi Moshe ben; Maimonides; Moses ben Maimon; Moses Maimonides; and Moses son of Maimonides. Obviously, no one took the trouble to consolidate these entries.

In many ways, it is a pity that Buchanan's book, though so well conceived, is so poorly executed. Its scope and its approach to the subject could have made it an important contribution not only to the understanding of New Testament eschatology but also to an understanding of the messianic idea in medieval Judaism. As it is, its many shortcomings mandate that it be read with great caution. The full history of medieval Jewish messianism, including both messianic thought and movements, still remains to be written.

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# Opening Another Gate

*Gates of Forgiveness (Sha'arey Selihah)*  
The Union Selichot Service: A Service of Preparation for the Days of Awe. New York. Central Conference of American Rabbis, 5740/1980.

Reviewed by ERIC L. FRIEDLAND

IN THE LAST few years the American Reform movement has been fertile in turning out new prayerbooks to replace the old *Union Prayer Book* that was launched in the 1890s and worked over in the twenties and in the forties. First came *Gates of Prayer* (1975), then *Gates of the House* (1977), to be followed by *Gates of Repentance* (1978). The latest addition to the series is the *Gates of Forgiveness* (1980), designed for *Selichot* services which are held, for the most part, on the Saturday night right before Rosh Hashanah. What makes this last production somewhat extraordinary is the fact that *Selichot*, or those penitential exercises prior to, and during, the High Holy Day period, had long pretty much atrophied from disuse in non-Orthodox rituals.<sup>1</sup> It took about a century before *Selichot* was to appear again, as a rule in pamphlet form, as in those versions compiled for Conservative synagogues by Rabbis Morris and Harold Silverman (Hartford, 1954), Ben Zion Bosker (New York, 1955), and the Rabbinical Assembly (New York, 1964). No doubt, these booklets played a part in giving Reform congregations the incentive to try their hand, too, at reintroducing the service and to compose modified versions of the traditional Penitential Service. Such varied attempts led, ultimately, to the creation of a single uniform treatment as in the present *Gates of Forgiveness*.

*Gates of Forgiveness* is very much an offshoot of *Gates of Repentance*,

the current Reform High Holy Day prayerbook. The text, translation, theology, and type are principally those found in the antecedent volume (and, in lesser degrees, the other *Gates* for worship as well). There are some pieces based on borrowings from the classical *Selichot* and others drawn from elsewhere. In one important way this *Gates* edition is clearly an improvement over its predecessors: at the end of the volume all sources are rightfully cited, supplying thereby a rich mine of information and reflecting wide learning. The practice of citing the sources of all the selections, old and new, and of furnishing their historical background in concise detail, is one that Editor Chaim Stern was wont to engage in for his earlier liturgical labors in England, before he came to the United States.<sup>2</sup> The only others of the *Gates* series to offer such extensive and exemplary notes are the less-used *Gates of the House* and *Gates of Understanding* (1977). Certainly everyone will profit from dipping into these notes. There is, admittedly, a single reservation: nary a reference is made to the precursory Conservative endeavors in the liturgical area. The Conservative *Mahzor* (New York, 1972), edited by Rabbi Jules Harlow and issued by the Rabbinical Assembly (RA), was the first congregational prayerbook to embrace the unpretentious and affecting personal prayer by the Hasidic *rebbe* Elimelekh of Lizhensk, asking to be free of envy and other petty traits.<sup>3</sup> The same rite also established a precedent in spreading the different sentences of the long, traditional Ashkenazic *Vidduy*, or Confession, over the various times that the Confession (also known as the *'Al Het*) was to be recited, to prevent undue prolongation and monotony.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the failure to give credit where due is, in this case, simply an oversight. A con-



templative piece by a Conservative rabbi, Jack Riemer, on the flight of time and the urgency to make amends does, however, occupy a place of prominence at the beginning of the Reform midnight service.<sup>5</sup>

Editors of non-Orthodox prayerbooks in the last decade or so have had a set of problems to wrestle with that generally did not have to be confronted before: 1) the suitability of modern literary compositions of a religious cast by Jewish (and even non-Jewish) writers outside the liturgical framework; 2) the reintroduction of hitherto discarded ceremonies or usages; 3) the selection of traditional texts; 4) sexist language; and 5) "God-talk." How these issues are handled in the contemporary *Siddur* reveals both the degree to which the compilers were willing to deal with them as well as the extent to which they were able to resolve them.

Our contemporary prayerbooks have a tendency to anthologize, to bring in a variety of poems and readings from a broad range of sources, whether religious or secular. Some of the rites interweave such additional pieces into the fabric of the service itself; others place them in an appendix from which to pick and choose. The purpose behind the inclusion of supplemental items may be twofold: 1) to leaven a fixed liturgy; and 2) to accommodate to a pluralism in theology and taste. Like its *Gates* predecessors, *Gates of Forgiveness* integrates these accessions into the very service itself. To be sure, most of the pieces are, in and of themselves, moving, reflective, and/or esthetically pleasing, and we are grateful to the compilers for bringing such pieces as those by Aaron Zeitlin, Muriel Rukeyser, Howard Nemerov, and Chaim Stern himself, to name but a few, to our attention and for our contemplation. While some of the selections are entirely appropriate

and fittingly situated in a *Selihot* service, a few may impress the reader/worshipper as being wrenched out of their original context and hopelessly out of place here. It is hard to escape the occasional feeling that we are being served a *mélange*. The eager desire to please and cater to all can now and then produce the opposite effect; and the valid wish to experiment and to be "with-it" sometimes turns out coy and cloying. It may be unfair to make comparisons, but one cannot help observing that the aforementioned British Liberal prayerbooks and the RA *Mahzor* (and the earlier *Selihot* pamphlet bearing the same imprint) were no less prone to venturesome experimentation but were, nonetheless, able to maintain a becoming restraint.

Perhaps, then, a desideratum would be to undertake a thoroughgoing methodological reexamination of how to put together a prayerbook. The presence of a *matbe'a shel tefillah*, a constant framework or determinate order, never constituted a bar to liturgical creativity, as witness the abundant output of *piyyutim*, or Hebrew liturgical poems, over the centuries. These prayerful lyrics, enlisted into the *Siddur*, were always made with the liturgy in mind and at heart. The composer knew the prayerbook, its underlying theology, its shifting moods, its literary idiom, and its users. Hence, whatever contributions were made could generally be joined organically into the prayerbook without marring its unity or integrity. Composer, composition, and community all hung together. A likely Christian analogue, in the musical sphere, would be Mozart's *Requiem* or any of Bach's chorales. Once upon a time there was a community of faith, and everyone recognized the religious landmarks. The situation of the

modern-day Jew, or Christian for that matter, is quite different. Today, what is taken for granted by one is not necessarily familiar to the other, even if the patrimony is the same. One can no longer count on every Jew's knowing the distinction between, say, *Kaddish* and *Kiddush*, or any baptized Christian's being able to tell apart a *Gloria Patri* and a *Sanctus*. Given this fragmented, uprooted state of affairs, it thus becomes necessary to turn from the periphery to the center, to use Franz Rosenzweig's language, or to tap the talents of those alienated or adrift from the heartland of Jewish life. Yes, by all means, let us bring to full flame the spark hidden in every Jew wherever he or she may be; but might one not ask, "Why are not those at the center itself, those who are at home in the liturgy, the Festivals, and other observances — and there are such! — Why are not they solicited to contribute of their creative store, too?"

In the early days of Reform the overriding issue centered, in large part, on which observances to drop or modify. Now, and for some time, the trend has noticeably reversed itself: innovation is, as often as not, reinstatement of a displaced custom. Bringing in *Havdalah* to preface the *Selihot* service and blowing the *shofar* to conclude it, as are done in *Gates of Forgiveness*, could be backed up halakhically and supported as possessing a certain educational value. People who hardly ever have the opportunity to witness a *Havdalah* ceremony at the termination of the Sabbath would now have their chance; moreover, they would be surprised to learn that the *shofar* may be blown at times other than Rosh Hashanah itself and the end of Yom Kippur. The chief difficulty with all of this is that, as the late Sartre put it during his prime, it is *de trop*; it is beset by a certain lack of proportion and of focus (despite the explanatory re-

marks in the Introduction that try to supply thematic links among the disparate parts of the service). It is perhaps somewhat symptomatic that only a number of the sections in *Gates of Forgiveness* bear titles; for instance, *Shema Qolenu* (p. 40) appears suddenly, unannounced, with no rubric. In the *RA Mahzor* the placement of the text underscores the drama and pathos of the prayer's yearning lines (e.g., p. 456).

Another question facing prayerbook compilers ever since the beginnings of liturgical change has been, "Which traditional texts — whatever the rite, be it Ashkenazic, ancient Palestinian or *minhag Roma* — should we acceptably resuscitate or continue to use?" A few remarks about a pair of such texts in *Gates of Forgiveness* might then be in order. As is only right, we are becoming more aware of the Sephardic component of our polychrome heritage, mostly, in all probability, because of the wondrous "ingathering of the exiles" that has been taking place in Israel. One result of that reunion is the opportunity granted for looking afresh at the non-Ashkenazic variants in the Jewish liturgy. What is not generally realized is that cross-fertilization has gone on in the Diaspora for some time, as in the Hasidic borrowings from the Sephardic rite in the eighteenth century and, a hundred or so years later, the Reformers' substantial appropriations from the same. In *Gates of Forgiveness*, a graceful Sephardic litany, *Eloheynu sheba-Shamayim* (literally "our God in heaven," here translated "our God above"), is taken up with a few minor adjustments. The verses are basically upbeat and not nearly as doleful as those of *Avinu Malkenu* ("our Father, our King"), particularly in the full-length Ashkenazic form. It is to be wondered whether the compilers of *Gates of Forgiveness*

were even aware that nineteenth-century American liturgical revisers, like Marcus Jastrow on the Conservative side and David Einhorn in the Reform camp, also adopted *Eloheynu sheba-Shamayim* — both men, interestingly enough, to replace *Avinu Malkenu* only in the Evening Service for Yom Kippur. In any event, *Gates of Forgiveness* did well to include the *Eloheynu sheba-Shamayim* sentences and to put them toward the end of the *Selihot* service, as the ark is opened, to signify “God’s presence in our midst.”

Our God above, we seek You;  
grant that we may find You.

Our God above, reveal to us the  
glory of Your Kingdom.

.....

Our God above, let peace reign  
among us.

Our God above, grant peace to  
the earth.

Our God above, grant abundance  
to Your world.

Our God above, hasten for us the  
day of redemption.

It is noteworthy that the old Yom Kippur *piyyut*, the grace-filled *Ki Hineh ka-Homer* (“Lo, as the potter moulds his clay”), has lost little of its appeal. Virtually all of our official rites have it in one form or another.<sup>6</sup> The editor of *Gates of Forgiveness* made this traditional Ashkenazic *piyyut* the basis of his own rewriting (p. 36). Enchanting as the Hebrew poem is and as lovely as the English re-writing is in its own right, if one thinks about it at all, he cannot help being bemused, in our autonomous age, by the implied determinism of the piece.

Sexist language is another matter of serious concern to contemporary Jewish liturgists, no less than to their Episcopal, Roman Catholic, and United Methodist equals. Thus, the rendition of the familiar *Eloheynu v-Elohey Avoteynu* (“our God and God of our Fathers”) in all the *Gates* publications as either “our

God and God of all generations” or “our God and God of all ages” could well be justified as a kind of happy exegetical update, to temper the *Siddur*’s incidental sexism. Another way of setting off the traditional liturgy’s tendency to portray God in masculine terms<sup>7</sup> is to call into play the Kabbalistic use of feminine imagery when speaking of the Deity. The word *Shekhinah* is a favorite one that harks back to the Talmudic era. The editor of *Gates of Forgiveness* took this occasion to write a *vers libre* poem as a counterbalance to the masculine representations of the imageless, nameless God. Here is a sample of verses directed to the “Mothering Presence:”

Do not tell me no,

do not tell me,

no, do not tell me NO!

Do not say my life adds up to  
naught.

If only You will shelter me.

if only You will be with me

If only You will walk with me.

Nor say that two & two are always  
four and must be so,

nor say because our hearts  
shall stop that love must end.

It’s a nice try, but, by ill luck, perhaps too cute.

Then there is the Object — and Subject — of the penitential prayers themselves. It might be mentioned, admittedly all too briefly, that geared as *Gates of Forgiveness* is in a pluralistic vein, like all of its companion volumes, it departs from *Gates of Repentance* by being undauntedly theocentric through and through. Specifically, the second service for Rosh Hashanah in *Gates of Repentance* is couched, for the most part, in non-theistic language. Contrastingly, the opening meditations in *Gates of Forgiveness* are preponderantly replete with God-talk, as is the whole *Selihot* service in general. We are

probably justified in assuming that an adherent of the non-theist, especially Polydox, position within Reform Judaism would not be all that hospitable to a *Selihot* service, anyhow.

Whatever strictures one may have concerning *Gates of Forgiveness*, they should in no way diminish the fact that the Central Conference of American Rabbis and, particularly, its ever-resourceful editor, Chaim Stern, are to be applauded for their arduous labors towards revitalizing Jewish worship. After all is said and done, though, the text is still not the test. It is, rather, the manner and spirit in which worship is conducted in the congregation or *havurah*. What truly matters is whether the worshipping community can provide the surroundings and the mood — a clearing in the wood — for the living encounter between the individual Jew of today and the eternal Fount of Life within the timeless fellowship of all Israel.

1. In the prayerbook that Rabbi Benjamin Szold, father of the famed Henrietta, compiled for his Baltimore congregation in 1863, a revised rite called *Abodath Israel*, he provided a *Selihot* service that is a smooth and unaffected blend of Ashkenazic and Sephardic prayers, judiciously chosen. In a subsequent edition of that prayerbook (1873), co-edited and further revised by Rabbi Marcus Jastrow, *Selihot* was no more.

2. Rabbis Chaim Stern and John Rayner collaborated in the creation of the estimable *Service of the Heart* (London, 1967) and the workman-like and sensitive *Gate of Repentance* [*Petaḥ Teshuvah*] (London, 1973), on which the American *Gates of Repentance* [*Sha'arey Teshuvah*], is largely based.

3. P. 382; *Gates of Forgiveness*, p. 45.

4. Pp. 406-408 and 464; *Gates of Repentance*, pp. 271-272 and 330-331; and *Gates of Forgiveness*, pp. 42-43.

5. *Gates of Forgiveness*, pp. 23-24.

6. *Union Prayer Book II* [1945], p. 122; the Reconstructionist *High Holiday Prayerbook II* [1948], pp. 72-75; the RA *Mahzor*, p. 394; *Gates of Repentance*, pp. 381-382.

7. It is interesting to note that the familiar *Avinu Malkenu* ("our Father, our King") remains intact in *Gates of Forgiveness*, and is translated literally. On the other hand, the aforementioned Conservative *Mahzor's* translation has the Hebrew royal/paternal divine epithet simply in transliteration, for what reason I am not entirely sure, as the title for the whole section is "Our Father, our King." One Rosh Hashanah a few years back, the writer of these lines worshipped with a *havurah* made up of students and young professionals. When the group reached the point when *Avinu Malkenu* was to be recited, someone suggested that the phrase, "our Father, our King," take turns with "our Mother, our Queen" to give equal time to both genders, as it were. Another member of the *havurah* quipped, in Protestant-like fashion, that the alternating feminine verses smacked suspiciously of Mariolatry! (Had the fellow known the reference, he might have adduced *Jeremiah* 44: 17ff which speaks of *malkat ha-shamayim* [the queen of heaven], to support his contention!) That settled the matter then and there. Facetiousness aside, there is no question that we need to be more sensitive and alive to the sexist language we use, intentionally or not, in addressing, or talking about, God. At point here is the need to steer clear of the ubiquitous trap of the trendy and the faddish, while acknowledging the necessity of change and doing something about it. Cf. William E. Phipps, "The Sex of God," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, XVI, 3 (Summer 1979): 515-517.

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## Jews in Europe

*Prophets Without Honor: A Background to Freud, Kafka, Einstein and Their World.* By FREDERIC V. GRUNFELD. New York. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979. 347pp + xiii. \$15.00.

*The Tongue Set Free: Remembrance of a European Childhood.* By ELIAS CANETTI. Trans. from German by Joachim Neugroschel. New York. The Seabury Press. 1979. 268pp. \$12.95.

*Reviewed by* DAVID BIALE

THE GERMAN-JEW continues to hold more fascination than do any of the other hyphenated hybrids of modern Jewish history. Perhaps it is a result of the profound contrast between the remarkable achievements of the last generation of German-Jews and their imminent doom, for the tension between assimilation and anti-Semitism was more acute in Germany than anywhere else in Europe. Or perhaps it is because of a sociological fact: close to a half of the German-Jews escaped annihilation and they succeeded in transplanting their singular culture in foreign soil. Hence, while little more remains of the Eastern European Jew than nostalgia for the *shtetl*, enough of the German-Jewish culture has become a part of Jewish American experience to make a study of the German-Jews in some ways a study of ourselves.

In recent years, a kind of revisionist historiography has grown up around the German-Jewish experience. Peter Gay and George Mosse have suggested that only in retrospect does anti-Semitism seem to have been such a major element in German-Jewish life, while the historical reality in pre-Nazi Germany was actually far less grim. These historians have argued that a

German-Jewish dialogue did, indeed, exist and that one can speak of an authentic German-Jewish culture, even though it differed drastically from traditional Jewish mores. Frederic Grunfeld's *Prophets Without Honor* follows along similar lines. Grunfeld is concerned to "give British and American readers some inkling of what was lost in the collapse of the Weimar Renaissance." While he does not ignore the lengthening shadows of anti-Semitism during the Weimar period, he downplays the influence of anti-Semitism and tries to demonstrate the impact of a wide assortment of German-Jews in German arts, letters and sciences.

What Grunfeld has done is to draw a group portrait of German-Jewish luminaries, some of whom had a distinctly Jewish consciousness while others were far more remote from their Jewish origins. He groups them together somewhat arbitrarily in evocatively but, finally, unhelpfully-named chapters ("From the Heart of Nature," "An Angel at the Gate," etc). He puts Gustav Mahler with Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka with Kurt Tucholsky and Albert Einstein with Arnold Schoenberg. Some of these combinations seem surprising but turn out to have a certain associative logic, such as Einstein with Schoenberg or Kafka with Tucholsky. But others, like Freud with Mahler, are forced at best. One distinct service that this book performs is to acquaint the reader with certain figures who are relatively unknown in the English-speaking world, such as the expressionist poet Else Lasker-Schüler or the anarchist Erich Mühsam. But while the biographies and writings of these lesser-known figures deserve circulation, those of better-known intellectuals like Freud, Kafka and Einstein appear superficial in Grun-

feld's book, given the tremendous attention that these latter have received elsewhere.

The problem with any collective biography is that the author must work mightily to convince his readers that there is anything collective about the group whom he has chosen. As Robert Wohl has shown in his book on *The Generation of 1914*, the notion of a generation is frequently a myth rather than a reality. It would seem that Grunfeld is more often seduced by the myth of the Weimar Jews than he is critical of it. His only attempt to find a common thread linking his subjects is in his introductory chapter, "A Family Resemblance." But while this title promises an incisive examination of the singular characteristics of the German-Jews, the chapter is perhaps the most disappointing in the book. Grunfeld notes that the German-Jews tended to move rapidly from success in commerce in the first assimilated generation to intellectual achievement in the second. However, he fails to explain adequately why this move happened. He resorts to the old saw about "the people of the book," which is frequently invoked when the author can think of no other reason for Jewish success. He calls Marx's dialectical logic an "unconscious reversion to an old kabbalist (sic) technique," which demonstrates as much ignorance of the Kabbalah as of Marx. He suggests that one common characteristic of the German-Jews is that they had an almost fanatical work ethic which drove them to much more intensive activity than the fabled Protestant work ethic did the Germans. But, again, he fails to explain the origins or causes of the phenomenal energy of the German-Jews.

Similarly, Grunfeld does not describe with sufficient accuracy the Jewish dilemma of his subjects. In the interest of making them a col-

lective, he downplays the powerful ambivalence of such figures as Kurt Tucholsky, whom some have described as a self-hater or Theodore Lessing, who invented the term self-hate as a partial self-description. While there is no doubt that the term self-hate may not capture fairly Tucholsky's ambivalence, Grunfeld should have faced more squarely the fact that many of his subjects had very confused Jewish identities. In general, his work is ill-served by his apologetic desire to make this an attractive generation of intellectuals when, in fact, many were hopelessly flawed and unheroic. Even if one can make a case for common elements in their Jewish problem, one must remain critical of their solutions to it.

Any attempt to explain the peculiar character of the Weimar Jews must focus on their relations to their parents who were already disconnected from their Jewish roots but not sufficiently acculturated in German society. This generation in limbo had few values to pass on to its sons and daughters. Hence, the extraordinary struggle with "the father" described by Freud may, as Kafka suggested, have as much to do with the father's Judaism (or lack of it) as with psychology. Both the prodigious energy and curious failings of the generation of sons and daughters must have to do with the frequent vacuousness and rootlessness of the families from which they came.

But Grunfeld has little to tell us in this vein. While the sub-title of his book promises "a background to Freud, Kafka, Einstein and their world," he delivers, instead, a series of relatively disconnected biographical sketches. Like much of what passes for intellectual history these days, his book is more concerned with gossip than with an examination of ideas and their common social origins. There are



too many names dropped unnecessarily and too many facile associations (in one place he suggests a relationship between "Jewish energy" and Einstein's theory of relativity). *Prophets Without Honor* brings to life a generation which deserves to be remembered, but it simply fails to address the really interesting questions about the character and origins of that generation.

One fascinating chapter in the history of Jews in Germany which is missing from Grunfeld's book is the role that Germany played in the education of Jews from Eastern Europe. Up to 1933, Germany remained the cultural magnet that attracted thousands of Jews from the East in search of enlightenment. Elias Canetti, the novelist and philosopher, is one of the those Eastern Jews for whom the German *Sprachbereich* became a second linguistic home. Canetti differs from many of the *Ostjuden* in that he came from a Sefardic family in Bulgaria rather than from the Ashkenazi hinterlands of Poland, Galicia and Russia. His parents had met in Vienna and spoke German between them. Canetti was raised with Ladino and Bulgarian. Later, his family emigrated to England where he learned English. Following the death of his father in 1913, Canetti moved with his family to Vienna and later to Zurich.

The international childhood and adolescence that he describes in his memoir, *The Tongue Set Free*, is in some ways symbolic, although not representative, of the cosmopolitan character of Jewish intellectuals in the years before Hitler. We tend now to forget that before the Jewish community became centered in North America and Israel, an international education made such an extraordinary impact on Jewish literati. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that the predominance of Jews in social criticism

may have something to do with their relative lack of attachment to particular national settings. Certainly, Canetti's influential book, *Crowds and Power*, owes something to his personal background.

The title of Canetti's current book hints at the intimate connection for Jews like him with language as a liberating force. Although he has lived for many years in England, he continues to write in German. He describes in almost painful detail how his mother forced him to learn that language when the family moved to Vienna. He later understood that her motivation was to compensate for the loss of her husband with whom her intimate language was German. In a sense, each language that Canetti learned became the repository for his emotional associations with the different cultures that he lived in. Language was at once a force that bound him but, also, a tool that he could use to liberate himself.

The most interesting aspect to this memoir is Canetti's relationship to his domineering mother. Having to assume very early the place of his dead father, Canetti exhibits an almost passive response to his mother's demands. The most impressive section of the book is the last chapter where his mother comes to Zurich and savagely attacks him for avoiding the hard realities of life by sinking into an aesthetic and intellectual life-style: "You think it's enough to *read* about something in order to know what it's like." This tension between the *vita contemplativa* and the harsh realities of life also informs Canetti's great novel *Auto-da-Fé*. In the end, his mother "expells" him from the "paradise in Zurich," and he comes to experience real life, just as Adam only "came into being . . . by an expulsion from Paradise."

Canetti's memoir ends with his "expulsion from Paradise" by his mother. What makes this book so



evocative is the intersection between Canetti's personal biography — and especially his ambivalent relationship to his mother — and the history of the Jews. The aesthetic attachment of the Jews to the European languages, and particularly German, proved to be a fatal flaw. Canetti's mother introduced him to these languages, but she also

warned him of their dangers. The Jews of Europe, and particularly of Germany, were also seduced, but in too many cases failed to hear the warning. Unwilling to be expelled from Paradise, they discovered too late that Paradise can all too easily turn into Hell.

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## Articles

| <i>Author</i>            | <i>Title</i>  | <i>Page</i> |
|--------------------------|---|-------------|
| ACKERMAN, WALTER I.      | On the Making of Jews   | 87          |
| AGUS, JACOB B.           | God in Kaplan's Philosophy  | 30          |
| BEN-HORIN, MEIR          | Kaplan's Hypothesis of Faith  | 36          |
| BERKOVITS, ELIEZER       | Judaism — A Civilization  | 53          |
| BERNHEIM, MARK A.        | Jewish Identity: The Surveyor Surveyed  | 322         |
| BLIEDSTEIN, ADRIEN JANIS | The Trials of Sarah   | 411         |
| BLUMENTHAL, DAVID R.     | "Of Small Things . . ."   | 247         |
| BOWLER, MAURICE G.       | C.G. Montefiore and His Quest   | 453         |
| BRAUNER, RONALD A.       | Implication and Meaning in Kaplan's<br>Use of Classical Jewish Sources                | 83          |
| BRESLAUER, S. DANIEL     | Alternatives in Jewish Theology   | 233         |
| DRESNER, RUTH RAPP       | The Work of Bertha Pappenheim   | 204         |
| EISENSTEIN, IRA          | Myths About Mordecai Kaplan   | 67          |
| EISENSTEIN, JUDITH K.    | My Father, Mordecai   | 11          |
| FISHER, EUGENE           | Anti-Semitism: A Contemporary<br>Christian Perspective                                | 276         |
| GITTLEMAN, SOL           | Mr. Sammler's Planet Ten Years Later;<br>Looking Back on the Crisis of<br>"Mishpocha" | 480         |
| GORDIS, ROBERT           | Does Secular Judaism Have a Future?   | 228         |
|                          | The Genesis of JUDAISM: A Chapter in<br>Jewish Cultural History                       | 390         |
|                          | Mordecai M. Kaplan — The Man and<br>The Movement                                      | 5           |
| GOTTLIEB, FREEMA         | Three Mothers   | 194         |
| GROSS, RITA M.           | Steps Towards Feminine Imagery of<br>Deity in Jewish Theology                         | 183         |
| HALPERN, BEN             | The Jewishness of Secular Judaism   | 225         |
| HUBERMAN, STEVEN         | Conversion in Judaism: An Analysis of<br>Family Matters                               | 312         |
| JOSPE, EVA               | Moses Mendelssohn: Some Reflections<br>on His Thought                                 | 169         |

| <i>Author</i>            | <i>Title</i>   | <i>Page</i> |
|--------------------------|--|-------------|
| KATSH, ETHAN M.          | The Medium Has A Message:<br>Television, Israel and The People of<br>the Book      | 295         |
| KAUFMAN, WILLIAM E.      | The Transnatural Theology of<br>Mordecai M. Kaplan                                 | 45          |
| KLEIN, JENNIE MACHLOWITZ | The Best of Both Worlds  | 105         |
| KRESSEL, NEIL J.         | Hating the Jews: A New View from<br>Social Psychology                              | 269         |
| KAHN, LOTHAR             | The American Jew in the Eighties   | 134         |
| LAZAROFF, ALLAN          | Judaism as an Art  | 355         |
| LEVINE, NORMAN           | The Tragedy of Bourgeois<br>Cosmopolitanism: On Martin Buber's<br>Politics         | 427         |
| LIEBER, DAVID            | Dr. Kaplan as a Teacher  | 21          |
| LIPSTADT, DEBORAH        | Invoking the Holocaust   | 335         |
| MAASS, RICHARD           | The American Jewish Community of the<br>1980s: A Different View                    | 156         |
| MALLER, ALLEN S.         | Jews, Cults and Apostates  | 306         |
| MANN, THEODORE R.        | Optimism Is Realism  | 163         |
| MARTIN, BERNARD          | Mordecai M. Kaplan and Reform<br>Judaism   | 72          |
| MILLMAN, HERBERT         | Kaplan's Influence on the Jewish<br>Community Center Movement                      | 96          |
| MIRSKY, NORMAN           | Toward a Theory of Modern Jewish<br>Social Control                                 | 444         |
| MORGAN, MICHAEL L.       | History and Modern Jewish Thought:<br>Spinoza and Mendelssohn on the<br>Ritual Law | 467         |
| PERLMUTTER, NATHAN       | Black-Jewish Relations: A Two-Way<br>Street  | 290         |
| PETUCHOWSKI, JAKOB J.    | What Is a Jew?   | 434         |
| PRELL, RIV-ELLEN         | The Dilemma of Women's Equality in<br>the History of Reform Judaism                | 418         |
| RAPHAEL, MARC LEE        | Female Humanity: American Jewish<br>Women Writers Speak Out                        | 212         |
| ROTH, SOL                | Black Anti-Semitism: Diagnosis and<br>Treatment                                    | 283         |

| <i>Author</i>         | <i>Title</i>   | <i>Page</i> |
|-----------------------|--|-------------|
| ROTSHEIN, MENAHEM D.  | A Study in Ambivalence: Arabs in Israeli Fiction                   | 484         |
| ROUTTENBERG, MAX J.   | My Teacher: A Reminiscence   | 15          |
| SASSO, DENNIS C.      | "I Also Am Evolving"   | 25          |
| SCHNALL, DAVID J.     | Orthodoxy Resurgent  | 460         |
| SILVER, MITCHELL      | The Roots of Anti-Semitism: A Kafka Tale and a Sartrean Commentary | 263         |
| SCHAFER, SAMUEL       | Modern Zionism — An Historic Perspective                           | 111         |
| SCHORSCH, ISMAR       | Zacharias Frankel and the European Origins of Conservative Judaism | 344         |
| SCHWARZ, SIDNEY H.    | Jewish Impotence — Jewish Power                                    | 142         |
| SIEGEL, SEYMOUR       | Kaplan and Jewish Law  | 59          |
| TORCZYNER, JACQUES    | Jews in the Eighties: Changing Perspectives for a Changing World   | 151         |
| WEISS, DAVID W.       | Night Train From Milan   | 396         |
| WEISS-ROSMARIN, TRUDE | An Interview with Walter Kaufmann                                  | 120         |

## Reviews

| <i>Reviewer</i> | <i>Book and Author</i>   |     |
|-----------------|--|-----|
| ARIEL, DAVID    | Rav Kook and the Mysticism of Political Renewal<br>Review-Essay on Abraham Isaac Kook — The Light of Penitence, The Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters and Poems<br>edited and translated<br>by Ben Zion Bokser | 250 |
| BIALE, DAVID    | Prophets Without Honour: A Background to Freud, Kafka, Einstein and Their World<br>by Frederic V. Grunfeld<br>and<br>The Tongue Set Free: Remembrance of a European Childhood<br>by Elias Canetti                                  | 504 |

|                    |  |     |
|--------------------|--|-----|
| FRIEDLAND, ERIC L. | Gates of Forgiveness ( <i>Sha'arey Selihah</i> )   | 499 |
| FRIEDMAN, MAURICE  | Buber's Way to "I and Thou"<br>Review-Essay on Buber's Way to "I<br>and Thou"<br>by Rivka Horwitz  | 363 |
| HOENIG, SAMUEL N.  | Erez-Israel in the Responsa Literature<br>compiled and edited by Israel<br>Schepansky  | 255 |
| LAYTNER, ANSON     | Mandarins, Jews, and Missionaries<br>by Michael Pollak   | 375 |
| MERKLE, JOHN C.    | Abraham Joshua Heschel and<br>the Divine-Human Encounter<br>Review-Essay on Abraham Joshua<br>Heschel<br>by Byron L. Sherwin<br>and<br>Divine-Human Encounter: A Study of<br>Abraham Joshua Heschel<br>by Harold Kasimow | 369 |
| MILLER, ALAN W.    | From Reform Judaism to Ethical<br>Culture: The Religious Evolution of<br>Felix Adler<br>by Benny Kraut   | 377 |
| ROBINSON, IRA      | The Messiah Texts<br>by Raphael Patai<br>and<br>Revelation and Redemption: Jewish<br>Documents of Deliverance from the<br>Fall of Jerusalem to the Death of<br>Nahmanides<br>by George Wesley Buchanan                   | 496 |
| Poems              |  |     |
| COHEN, SHLOMIT     | Wife of Kohelet<br>Tr. by Yisha Tobin  | 104 |
| FRANK, BERNHARD    | Returning to Germany: Forty-three<br>Years Later   | 407 |
| FRANKEL, ELLEN     | Shiva  | 305 |
| KANFER, ALLEN      | Cemetery in Missouri   | 443 |
| SCHWARTZ, HOWARD   | Gathering The Sparks   | 249 |
| WILK, MELVIN       | Words For Passover   | 246 |

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